

Using Your Photographic Eye

In the book "[The Photographer's Eye](#)," John Szarkowski identifies the following six characteristics as the key elements of a photograph: the object itself, detail, frame, time, vantage point, and light.

What You'll Need:

- A digital camera or phone camera
- Cardboard box of any size
- Creativity!

The Activity:

In this activity, you will be finding your *own* photographic eye while practicing these six characteristics of photography. Your subject? One of the most commonly found objects in the home: a cardboard box! By exploring the elements of photography, you may surprise yourself with how many ways you can capture the essence of a box.

A good photograph is equally dependent upon both its subject and the way in which the photographer positions themselves relative to the subject. For each characteristic listed below, take a photograph that focuses on that element of photography. You are encouraged to take multiple photos for each characteristic and choose your favorite at the end!

1. **The Thing Itself:** Take a picture of your box in its "natural habitat." Think about how you encounter a box in your everyday life.
2. **The Frame:** This is when you decide where the photograph ends and begins. What are you including? What are you excluding? The composition can be formal or loose, close-up or far away, straight on, from above, from the side.
3. **Time:** Not only can the photograph freeze time, but it can document time, render it, expose it, distort it, subject it, and reveal it. Explore how you are able to capture your box at different moments in time.
4. **Vantage Point:** Vantage point is not always in our control as photographers. When we can be intentional about the vantage point, the photographs often reveal a very different world than we are accustomed to seeing. What's the old saying? "It's all about perspective."
5. **Light:** Did you know that "photography" actually comes from the Greek word "light-writing?" Before digital photography, the success of a photograph was based solely on how well a negative was exposed to light. Today, we can use light to capture beautiful sunsets or the light seeping through your bedroom window in the morning. Think about placing your box in a new light.

6. **The Detail:** Often a photograph can tell a story without telling the *whole story*. The details you choose make you the narrator. Hint: you can manipulate the box to reveal details that are not usually noticeable. Feel free to tear into the box to reveal the inner pattern of the cardboard.



Art Vocabulary

Composition – (n) the placement or arrangement of the visual elements, such as figures, trees, and so on in a work of art, as distinct from the subject or the style with which it is depicted.

Vantage Point – (n) the position from which the artist views their subject. It can be thought of as the point of reference from which all elements of the artwork can be related.

Sources: [https://kids.kiddle.co/Composition_\(visual_arts\)](https://kids.kiddle.co/Composition_(visual_arts))
www.creativeglossary.com/art-perspective/vantage-point.html

To see example images of each photographic element, go to page 3. Photographs were taken by Katie Brandao, the Ackland Art Museum’s Public Programs Intern for 2020–2021.

For additional examples in the Ackland’s collection, go to page 4 or explore more photographs [online](#).

When you are done with the activity, we encourage you to share your favorite images with us by tagging the Ackland Art Museum on your social media of choice!



@ackland_art_museum



@AcklandArtMuseum



@AcklandArt

*This activity, created by Katie Brandao, was adapted from an “Introduction to Photography” assignment, taught by Michael Keaveney at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Example Images:

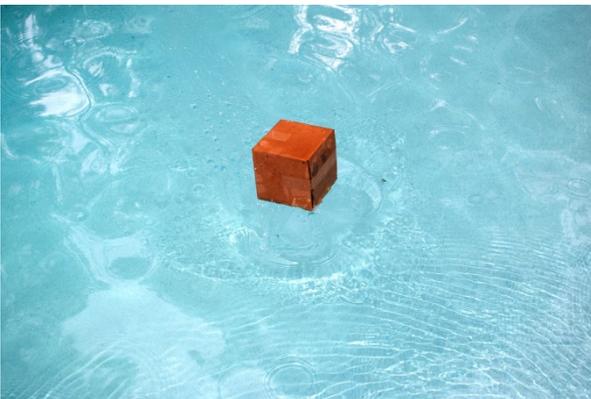
1. The Thing Itself



2. The Frame



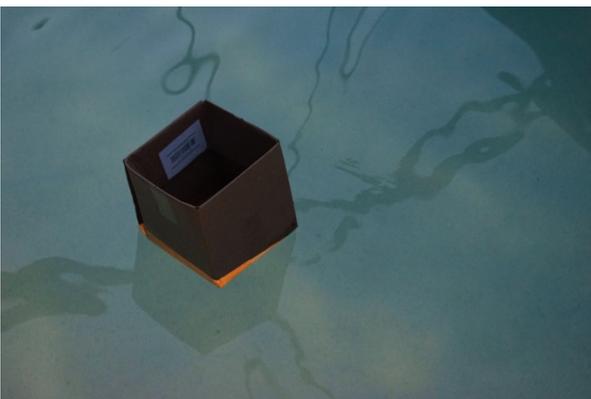
3. Time



4. Vantage Point



5. Light



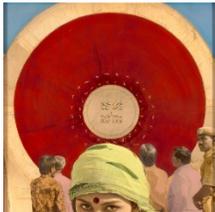
6. The Detail



Explore a selection of photographs from the Ackland's collection that highlight six key characteristics of photography - the object itself, detail, frame, time, vantage point, and light. For additional images, go [online to search the Ackland's collection](#).



Lucinda W. Bunnen (American, b. 1930)
[Water Vessels, from the portfolio Burkina Faso](#), 2003, printed 2007
Carbon pigment inkjet print
11 9/16 x 16 7/16 in. (29.4 x 41.8 cm)
Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Gift of Lucinda W. Bunnen, 2012.29.2.3



Pamela Singh (Indian, born 1962)
[Tantric Self-Portrait in Jaipur #1](#), 2000-2001
gelatin silver print, hand-colored with oil, acrylic, gold, mud,
and vermilion powder
37 x 37 in. (94 x 94 cm)
Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Ackland Fund, 2005.1



Harold Edgerton (American, 1903-1990)
[Milk Drop Coronet, from Harold Edgerton: Ten Dye Transfer Photographs](#),
1957, printed 1985
dye transfer photograph
18 5/16 x 13 7/16 in. (46.5 x 34.1 cm)
Ackland Art museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Gift of the Harold and Esther Edgerton Family Foundation, 96.13.2



Jane L. O'Neal (American, born 1945)
[Persimmon #1](#), 2005, printed 2013
Archival inkjet print
image: 15 x 15 in. (38.1 x 38.1 cm) sheet: 20 7/8 x 17 in. (53 x 43.2 cm)
Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Gift of the Artist, 2014.5



Ralph Gibson (American, born 1939)
[Untitled \(Hand on Door\), from The Somnambulist](#), 1969
gelatin silver print
Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Gift of Gene Thornton, 2007.15.2



Gary Schneider (American, born South Africa, 1954)
[Retinas, from Genetic Self-portraits](#), 1998
toned gelatin silver print
49 5/16 x 51 11/16 in. (125.2 x 131.3 cm)
Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Ackland Fund, 2006.17.2a-b