



EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART

EDUCATOR PACKET

***Adirondack Vernacular:
The Photography of
Henry Beach***

September 19 — February 22, 2003

Introduction

Biography

Henry M. Beach (b. 1863, d. 1943), though never professionally trained, utilized his innate talent to become one of the most engaging photographers of his place and time. Throughout his life, Beach witnessed the dramatic changes that overtook America from the close of the Civil War to the beginnings of modern America, and sought to capture the effects of these trends in his images depicting life in his native Adirondacks. Beach was born in 1863 in Lowville, New York, a modest community of farmers and loggers. In 1886 Beach married Bertha W. Brown, and the couple raised four children. Around 1906, after Beach had been in the photography business for almost twenty years, his family relocated to Remsen, NY, a town north of Utica, which sits on the fringe of the Adirondack Mountains. It was following this move that his work began to take on a more professional and complex dimension, as Beach made his living traveling throughout the Adirondacks photographing local activities, industries, and newsworthy events. Following a move to Fort Plain, NY, Beach and his family finally returned to his hometown of Lowville where Beach passed away in January of 1943.

He worked at a time when industrial and economic advances were overtaking the nation, leading to clashes between rural and urban landscapes. While some artists lamented this commercial direction, Beach embraced the new technologies and made a point to showcase in his work the juxtaposition of modernity and traditional conventions. He felt that the changes facing his region could best be seen in the faces of the common man, and deliberately focused much of his work on images depicting loggers, fishermen, and other members of the labor community. Like many artists before him, he produced the bulk of his work for commercial purposes, offering his services first as a portrait photographer, and then as an advertiser for local businesses. He also produced thousands of postcards, which, at the turn of the century, were a lucrative enterprise for local photographers. This foray into commercial art ultimately prevented his work from being included in the catalogue of great American photographers, as he was believed to have exploited his talent for the purpose of profit. It is for this reason that his work has only recently been hailed as exemplary among Adirondack photographers. However it is clear upon viewing his images that his sensitivity to subject and medium are on par with his more notable contemporaries.

As artist, innovator, and historian, Henry Beach's legacy is that of a multi-faceted photographer, able to document the transformations facing his corner of the adolescent nation.

Lesson 1: Documenting the Vernacular

NYS Learning Standards:

The Arts: Standards 1, 2, 3,4

English Language Arts: Standards 1, 2, 3

Goals:

- Students will examine the work of Henry M. Beach and identify the elements of the Adirondack vernacular in his work.
- Students will create a photograph or series of photographs typifying the vernacular elements in their environment; and write a short artist statement explaining their choices.

Activities:

- Students will read the one page biography of Henry M. Beach enclosed in packet. They will then read the quote from Adirondack Vernacular, The Photography of Henry M. Beach, by Robert Bogdan and the dictionary definition of the word vernacular.
- In a whole group setting or in small groups students will discuss Hammond, NY; Huckleberry Charlie; Came Back After Her Treasures; They Came Up in High Water; Tracy and Favreau; Sandy beach and swimmers, Lake Brantingham, NY (copies for small group discussions can be made from CD images or enclosed photo sheet). Students will identify the subject of each picture and see how the photograph/postcard represents the vernacular of the Adirondack region in the early 1900's.
- Students will take photographs or create drawings of their own vernacular. Topics could be Central New York Vernacular, Sport's Vernacular, Mall Vernacular, School Vernacular, Teen Vernacular, Friendship Vernacular. (This project could be an individual project, small group project, or a whole class assignment. A Power Point presentation of the images would be a very effective way of exhibiting the work.)
- Students will write a reflection explaining their choice of imagery portraying the personal vernacular they chose to represent.

Dictionary Definition of Vernacular for "Documenting the Vernacular" Lesson

Vernacular: \Ver*nac"u*lar\, a. [L. vernaculus born in one's house, native, fr. Verna a slave born in this master's house, a native, probably akin to Skr. Vas to dwell.]
Belonging to the country of one's birth; one's own by birth or nature; native; indigenous

Noun

1. The standard native language of a country or locality.
2. a. The everyday language spoken by a people as distinguished from the literary language.
b. A variety of such everyday language specific to a social group or region

Adjective

1. Native to or commonly spoken by the members of a particular country or region.
2. Using the native language of a region, especially as distinct from the literary language.
3. Occurring or existing in a particular locality

Robert Bogdan, author of *Adirondack Vernacular: The Photography of Henry M. Beach*, discusses what he means by *vernacular*.

The postcards of Thirsty Pond, Huckleberry Charlie, and the Waldheim cabin illustrate an important point. Photographs do not possess their own meaning. We take photos, see them, interpret them, and feel them differently depending on our background experience. Although there is variation within any group, people who take and look at pictures of their own culture take different pictures and see what is taken differently from outsiders! Beach was of the North Country, a native in the sense that the term is used in those parts. He worked within a particular visual language that was part and parcel of the Adirondacks. Many of his photographs were for his own people. He was a vernacular photographer.⁸

Bogdan's footnotes:

7. Interestingly, it is conventional in the art world to call indigenous artists outsiders (as in "outsider art") rather than insiders.
8. Vernacular is a word used by people who write about art photography to refer to a particular style of documentary personified by the work of Walker Evans. The term is used in that context to refer to images that have a realist or vernacular feel. My use of the term is different. In my way of thinking the work of people like Beach is authentic vernacular, whereas "vernacular style" is an attempt to create the feeling of the local color.

From *Adirondack Vernacular, The Photography of Henry M. Beach*, by Bob Bogdan, Syracuse University Press, 2003. Page 186

Lesson 2: Examining the Principles of Composition in the Work of Henry M. Beach

NYS Learning Standards:

The Arts: Standard 3

English Language Arts: Standard 1, 3, 4

Goals:

- Introduction to the Principles of Composition
- Compositional analysis of six Henry M. Beach photographs
- Student-centered discussion, encouraging students to express their own point of view, while giving evidence from the image, in their analysis of the Beach photographs to their peers.

Materials:

- Study guide
- Beach images
- Small piece of overhead transparency to create grid for rule of thirds

Question to consider:

How will studying the work of artist Henry M. Beach influence the students' work?

Activities:

The following study guide will help students learn about the principles of design, through reading factual information and then immediately relating that information to an analysis of six of Henry M. Beach's photographs.

Small groups (three or four students) would benefit from completing the study guide together. The students' discussion about the photographs would help develop evidential reasoning skills. It is necessary to understand the written text and then be able to apply that text to the photographic analysis. Small groups would need to constantly be rechecking for understanding and listening to other's viewpoints to fill out the charts and answer the questions.

The study guide could also be used as a guided whole group activity.

This study guide directly refers to photography, but the principles transfer to other areas of the visual arts in which introduction to good compositional elements is addressed.

Name:
Period

Date:
Class:

Examining the Principles of Composition in the work of Henry M. Beach

from *Adirondack Vernacular: The Photography of Henry M Beach*,
Everson Museum of Art, September 19, 2003- February 15, 2004

You will be looking at reproductions of photographs by Henry M. Beach, who documented life in the Adirondack region at the turn of the 20th century. You will be reading about principles of composition/elements of design and then looking for those principles or elements in the work of Beach.

Good photographic composition has been characterized as a "harmonious combination of a main subject and its supporting elements." This study will acquaint you with the basic principles of composition. Reviewing the design concepts and examining the elements in the photographs of Beach will help you transfer these ideas to your own art. It will also help you become familiar with the work of an important Adirondack photographer.

Point of Interest:

Most photographs have a single point of interest to which the eye is drawn. The remaining details of the photograph will support that point of interest. If there is nothing to attract attention to a particular area, the eye wanders through the scene. You will learn about the use of the following techniques, which help focus attention on the subject of the photograph:

- Rule of Thirds
- Leading Lines
- Foreground and Background
- Framing
- Lighting
- Silhouetting
- Compositional Lines
- Balance
- Rhythm
- Camera Angle
- Tone
- Depth Perception

Material used in this study was taken from: Principles of Composition, Integrated Publishing website www.tpub.com.

The Rule of Thirds:

Photographers do not usually place the *point of interest* in the exact center of the photograph, because it divides the photograph into two equal parts rather than one cohesive whole. Some photographers create a grid dividing the photograph into thirds both vertically and horizontally and locate the point of interest at one of the four intersections of these lines. An ex-ample is shown at right.

Create your own grid, the size of the Beach images you will be looking at, on an overhead transparency. Place the grid over the Beach images.

Look at the Beach photographs and fill in the chart below:

Photograph	Rule of Thirds: Yes or No	What object is at the intersection of two of the lines?
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>		
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>		
<i>They Come Up Here...</i>		
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>		
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing...</i>		
<i>Drug and Grocery Stores...</i>		

Leading Lines:

One way of directing attention to your point of interest is the use of leading lines, shapes, or patterns. Curved lines lend grace to a photograph, while strong horizontal lines combined with vertical lines indicate strength and power.

Look at the Beach images.

In which photographs did Beach use leading lines?

Note what kind of object provided the line.

Foreground and Background:

Sometimes the *point of interest* in a photograph is found in the middle ground. In this kind of photograph the foreground (area in front of the *point of interest*) or background (area behind the *point of interest*) can be used to develop depth and draw attention to the *point of interest*. For example, when you place objects related to the subject in the foreground, the foreground and the point of interest (in the middle ground) both become more important. Too many details in the foreground or background can detract from the *point of interest*. Sometimes the foreground or background can be deliberately blurred to draw attention to the *point of interest* in the middle ground.

For each photograph put an X in the box that shows where the *point of interest* is. Note which objects in the other “grounds” help to emphasize the *point of interest*.

Photograph	Foreground	Middle Ground	Background
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>			
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>			
<i>They Came Up Here...</i>			
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>			
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing</i>			
<i>Drug and Grocery Store</i>			

Framing:

Another technique for drawing attention to the point of interest is by framing it with a foreground object. The object could be an arch, a window, a tree limb, or even an arm or leg.

Look at Beach's photographs.

Which photograph/s show foreground framing? What is the foreground framing element?

Photograph	Framing? Yes or No	Framing Element
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>		
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>		
<i>They Came Up Here...</i>		
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>		
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing</i>		
<i>Hammond Store</i>		

Lighting:

Lighting is another important creative element of composition. A photographer can control the light and direct it to give prominence to the point of interest. Minor objects or distracting elements in the scene can be subdued or strong lighting can direct the eye to the point of interest. It is easier for a photographer to control lighting in the studio. When photographs are taken outside, the photographer must use the natural light at a specific time of day to highlight the point of interest. Soft and diffused lighting creates the most detail. Side lighting is effective in showing texture. Light falling diagonally from above and to one side of the camera (sunlight) is the most natural form of illumination.

What kind of lighting do you see in the Beach photographs?
Why do you think he used this type of lighting?

Silhouetting:

Silhouetting happens when a subject is lit from behind and then underexposed. A silhouette can help give overall strength to a composition and can isolate the subject or point of interest through the contrast of the dark foreground against the lighter background.

List two Beach photographs that use silhouetting and tell which objects are silhouetted.

Compositional Lines:

We can find lines everywhere. Lines are formed by the horizon, a person's limbs, the side of a building, or a winding road. These lines—horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or curved—lend their own element of emphasis to a composition. Vertical lines suggest strength and dignity. Horizontal lines suggest tranquility and rest. The diagonal line or a variety of lines suggest action. Curvaceous lines create a feeling of grace and beauty.

Put a check in the box or boxes which identify the compositional line/s Henry Beach used.

Photograph	Horizontal Lines	Vertical Lines	Diagonal or a Variety of Lines	Curvaceous
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>				
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>				
<i>They Came Up Here...</i>				
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>				
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing</i>				
<i>Drug and Grocery Stores...</i>				

Balance:

A balanced composition gives a feeling of harmony to the photograph. Your viewer should not get the uneasy feeling that the elements may come tumbling out of your composition (unless that is your intention). Each section of the composition should have equal weight or value. Balance can best be achieved by offsetting unequal sizes, shapes, tones, and objects in the photograph. A small object placed a greater distance from the center counterbalances a much larger object just as though it was on a teeter-totter. A small object of considerable importance and weight can be used to balance a large, but less important object. The size of the object is one way the "weight" is determined. Something can also be "heavy" if the tone is very dark or very light.

Look at Came Back After Her Treasure.

Notice the small dark figure in the left foreground.

What large object does this element balance?

Look at Tracy and Faveau.

Notice the small white box in the right foreground. If this was on one side of a teeter totter what would be on the other side?

Rhythm or Pattern:

A photograph can emphasize the point of interest and still maintain unity through the use of rhythm. Rhythm means a repetition of some kind of shape or line. An example in nature would be a field of wheat, blown in the wind, with each stem being bent the same way in the breeze, producing rhythm and changing patterns. The hubcaps at right are also an example of a rhythmic photograph.

Do you see any repetition of a certain line or shape which adds to the unity of the composition in Beach's photographs?

Photograph	If there is repetition of line or shape list element below
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>	
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>	
<i>They Came Up Here...</i>	
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>	
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing</i>	
<i>Drug and Grocery Stores...</i>	

Camera Angle:

The camera angle can help place emphasis on the point of interest. When the camera is placed above the level of the subject, it creates a distant and detached view. A frontal view creates a flat appearance. Shooting from a low angle produces a dramatic and statuesque effect. See what kind of angles Beach used.

Photograph	Above	Frontal	Below
<i>Huckleberry Charlie</i>			
<i>Came Back After Her...</i>			
<i>They Came Up Here...</i>			
<i>Tracy and Favreau</i>			
<i>Sand Beach and Bathing</i>			
<i>Drug and Grocery Stores...</i>			

Tone:

Tone refers to the gray values or degrees of lightness and darkness in a black and white photograph. The tones in a photograph can go from bright white, through all the gray values, to dark black. If the point of interest has a light tone, a strong dark contrasting tone next to it can draw attention to the point of interest. As in the idea of balance in the size of objects, the lights and darks in a photograph must be balanced to have a pleasing composition.

How has Beach used the idea of balancing tone (light and darkness) to place emphasis on *Huckleberry Charlie*?

How has Beach used tone to help create the stability and balance of *Tracy and Favreau*?

Depth Perception:

A photograph has only two dimensions—length and width, but the photographer tries to create a feeling of depth to make things look more realistic and three-dimensional. In real life your brain is constantly comparing the size of the objects you see. Your brain tells you that things closer appear larger, while things farther away appear smaller. A photographer uses this idea of relative size to add depth to a composition. You can easily create the illusion of depth in a photograph by placing common objects in the foreground or background, so the relative size of all objects can be determined.

They Come Up Here in High Water is one of Beach's "freak" postcards. How did he play with the idea of depth perception to create this postcard?

The feeling of depth can also be increased by making the foreground darker in tone than the main point of interest or the background. In which photographs does Beach use this technique?

Pertinent Web Links:

www.adirondackmuseum.org

Museum in Blue Mountain, NY which houses large collection of Beach photographs.

www.adirondackhistory.org

General local history

www.adirondacklife.com

General site www.adirondacks.com General site

www.masterpieces.com

List of Adirondack links

www.protectadks.org

Conservation site

www.sah.orgibibs/adrbib.htm

Adirondack bibliography

www.sharpphoto.com

Contemporary Adirondack photos

www.adirondack-books.com

Online store with a history of postcards

www.eastrnan.org

Photography museum in Rochester, NY

www.postcardpost.com/bvl.htm

Beach postcards depicting train wreck

www.masters-of-photography.com

Biographies of great Early-20th Century photographers

www.pbs.org/lctca/americanphotography/index.html

20th Century American photos

www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lcids/tech/1900/

Children's site on technology in the 1900s

<http://postcards.www.media.mitedu/Postcards/>

The Electric Postcard, send messages and postcards on the Internet.

Photography Glossary:

Aperture

Opening through which light passes through the lens en route to the film. Controls intensity of light in the photo.

Depth of Field

The space captured in a photograph that appears to be in focus - the distance between the nearest and farthest points that appear in sharp focus in a photograph. It can be manipulated to insure that the subject is the only part of the image to be focused upon.

Film

The film is the light sensitive medium on which the photograph is recorded. There are 2 main types of film, Print film and Slide film. Print Film: Film, which records the image in a negative format. The negative is then used to render a print, which displays the positive image. Slide Film: Slide film, also known as Chrome Film, records the image as a positive. Reversal paper is used to make a print from this medium, and is more expensive.

Flash

A pulse of light which, when positioned directly above the camera, can eliminate the harsh shadows that are often seen in simple snap shots. It can also be used to eliminate 'red eye.'

Gelatin Silver Print

The most universally accepted black and white photographic printing process used since the 1880's, recognized for its durability. Photosensitive particles called silver halides are suspended in a very thin gelatin layer on photographic paper. When exposed to light and then processed in the appropriate chemicals, these particles react and change according to the density and brilliance of the light reaching them through the negative, creating the range of black and white tones in a photograph.

Lens

Normal Lens: Any lens that produces an image in the viewfinder that is the same as what the eye sees is known as a normal lens.

Prime Lens: 80mm, 105mm, or 200mm lenses for example, are considered prime lenses. Primes are often considered faster and thus a wider aperture is possible. Prime lenses often produce a higher quality image than a zoom.

Wide Angle Lens: Any lens that includes more in the viewfinder than a normal lens is wide angle. Wide-angle lenses often have a very high depth of field and can yield very interesting perspective shots.

Zoom Lens: Allows the user to focus on one aspect of a subject, usually a small aspect magnified to many times its actual size

Multiple Exposures

As the term implies, multiple exposures involve exposing the same frame of film more than one time. Special effects shots can sometimes only be performed with the aid of multiple exposures. An example is shooting the moon with a long telephoto lens, then switching to a shorter lens to shoot a landscape. This way the moon will appear much larger on the horizon than it would normally.

Negative

The most widely used film type in photography for both black and white, and color. When this film is exposed to light in the camera, the emulsion captures the light in opposite wavelengths from the actual scene. Once processed, the negative image looks reversed from the actual scene when viewing the negative. When a negative is placed in an enlarger and light is transmitted through it, the image colors also look reversed. Photographic printing paper is specifically made to react to this light transmitted through the negative in opposite wavelengths to return the image to its original color rendition or black and white tonal range.

Pinhole Photography

Pinhole photography involves making a pinhole in the end of a box, tube, or any other object that can be made light proof, and then placing film or paper in the other end to expose by the light entering. Pinhole cameras have an enormous depth of field due to the very small aperture, enough that some consider photographs to be 3 dimensional because nearly everything in the photograph is in focus.

Platinum Print

Although there is evidence that some experimentation occurred before, the Platinum printing process, also referred to as the Platinotype process, was invented and patented in 1873, and by the turn of the century, platinum prints were very popular, valued for their beauty and their intrinsic permanence. Platinum — and later Palladium when platinum became more difficult to obtain - are two of the most inert elements in existence, which contributes greatly to the extreme archival stability of platinum prints. Unlike gelatin silver prints in which the silver halides are suspended in gelatin on the paper, the platinum particles are embedded within the fibers of the paper, which results in an image that is as permanent as the paper itself. The very nature of the process also accounts for the different look and texture of Platinum prints.

Shutter Speed

The length of time in which the film is exposed to light is known as the shutter speed. Faster shutter speeds allow for crisper pictures because camera shake and subject movements will be minimized. Slower shutter speeds can be used to create blurring effects or may be needed to properly expose darker subjects.

Image List

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
*Came Back After Her Treasures,
One of the Dwellings Wrecked by the Flood, Herkimer, N Y, 1910*
Photograph Postcard
Private Collection

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
Drug and Grocery Stores, Main Street, Hammond, NY.
Modern reprint from original glass plate negative
Courtesy of The Adirondack Museum, P3812

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
Huckleberry Charlie, Pine Camp, ca. 1908
Photograph Postcard
Bogdan Collection

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
Sand Beach and Bathing, Lake Brantingham, NY, ca. 1917
Photograph Postcards
Bogdan Collection

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
They Come Up in High Water, We Caught Several of Them, ca.1911
Modern reprint from original glass plate negative
Courtesy of The Adirondack Museum, P2947

Henry M. Beach
American, 1863-1943
Tracy and Favreau Meat Market, c. 1910
Modern reprint from original glass plate negative
Courtesy of the Adirondack Museum, P3111

Robyn Tomlin
American, b. Canada, 1965
Flower Talk, detail, 2003
Video sculpture still
Artist Collection