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45th & Oak, Kansas City, Missouri

Teacher Guide | Sept. 16, 2023 – Feb. 11, 2024

EVELYN HOFER

EYES ON THE CITY

Evelyn Hofer: Eyes on the City celebrates the work of an innovative and underrecognized photographer whose career spanned five decades. Born in Germany in 1922, Evelyn Hofer emigrated with her family to Switzerland in 1933. She studied photography as a teen and, after embarking on a career as a professional photographer, settled in New York in 1946. She soon found success producing photo essays for magazines, and her work caught the attention of book publishers. Starting in the late 1950s, Hofer received commissions from various publishers to create photobooks illustrating places around the world, including Florence (1959), London (1962), Spain (1964), New York (1965), Washington, D.C. (1966), and Dublin (1967). Photographs from each of these projects are featured in the exhibition, along with documents that detail Hofer's unique and deliberate working methods and her collaboration with the writers who produced the text components of her photobooks.

EXHIBITION CONTENTS

You will see 105 photographs, all taken by Evelyn Hofer. Of these, 81 are in black-and-white and 24 are in color. You will also see some of Hofer's journals and notes, as well as pages from her early magazine work and copies of the photobooks themselves.

The photographs are grouped by publication, with images from each photobook shown together.

GOOD TO KNOW

Evelyn Hofer: Eyes on the City is on view in the museum's featured exhibition galleries (L13 and L14). A ticket fee is required for the general public to visit this exhibition. School groups can enter the exhibition at no charge by booking a free self-guided school tour. Visit nelson-atkins.org/tours for more information.

School groups that are unable to visit the museum in person can use this guide to engage with the exhibition online. Selected works can be viewed at <https://art.nelson-atkins.org/mycollections/6379/evelyn-hofer-eyes-on-the-city/objects>.

The photographs in this exhibition all measure at least 11 x 14 inches, making them viewable by 2-3 people at a time.

Wall labels next to each photograph provide information about the work and insights into Hofer's artistic practice. Additionally, selected labels throughout the exhibition feature the voices of six Kansas Citians from varying backgrounds – including two photographers, one architect, and one poet – who shared their perspectives on Hofer's photographs.

In addition to the exhibition itself, you may wish to visit the museum's photography galleries (L10.5 – L11). There, in the exhibition *Cities are for People*, you will find works by photographers who were active at the same time as Evelyn Hofer, but whose quick, often surreptitious "street photography" approach contrasted with Hofer's slow and deliberate process.

Discussion questions in this guide are categorized as:

INQUIRING EYE – focused on close looking and visual analysis;

ART & PLACE – consider how photographs can convey the character of a place;

ARTIST AS OBSERVER – activity prompts for student photographers.

BEFORE VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

In describing one of her photobooks, Evelyn Hofer noted, “I wanted to try to capture the quintessence of the city.” Quintessence can be thought of as the heart and soul of something – the essence of that thing in its purest and most concentrated form.

Search online for photographs of your own city. Identify images that you think capture its quintessence, and share the reasons for your selections.

Think about a place you know well or a place that left a lasting impression on you. How would you describe that place’s quintessence? Write a few words or sentences to capture your thoughts.

Think about how you could show the quintessence of that place in a photograph. What details, scenes, or people would you include? What feeling or mood would the photograph have, and how could you achieve that?

Evelyn Hofer photographed several major cities and one entire country for her photobook assignments. Choose one of the locations below and create a mind map recording your knowledge and associations related to it.

- Florence
- London
- Spain
- New York
- Washington, D.C.
- Dublin
- Paris

When you view the exhibition, you can compare your mind map with the photographs Hofer took of the location you chose. Do her images align with your understanding of that place?

FEATURED WORKS



INQUIRING EYE

Look carefully these two photographs, and make a list of words or phrases that come to mind for each of them. Are there any words shared between both lists?

ART & PLACE

One of these photographs shows a wide view of London in an exterior shot, while the other focuses on one working individual within a close-cropped interior scene. How does each image convey a sense of London’s overall character? Do you think one does that more effectively than the other?



ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Think about how you could capture the character of your own city or town in a similar pair of photographs. Take one photograph that focuses on its physical layout (such as buildings, roads, or bridges) and one that focuses on people at work. Which aspect(s) of your city’s character are you able to convey in each image?

Thames Bridge, London, 1962

Headwaiter, Garrick Club, London, 1962



Harlem Church, New York, 1964

Lee Friedlander (American, born 1934), *New York City*, 1963



INQUIRING EYE

Compare and contrast these two views of New York City. One was taken by Hofer, and the other was taken by her contemporary Lee Friedlander. How are the two photographs different? What qualities do they share?

ART & PLACE

When starting a new project, Hofer spent time acquainting herself with the place she would be photographing. Only after walking the streets and researching shooting locations would she begin taking pictures, carefully constructing each shot's composition, lighting, and vantage point. This approach differed greatly from that of street photographers like Friedlander, who preferred speed and spontaneity. What impression of New York City is conveyed through each of these approaches? Which one better aligns with your own idea of what New York is like?

ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Try out both Hofer's slow and deliberate method for taking photographs and the fast shooting style of Friedlander. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?



Secretaries in Rawlins Park, Washington, DC, 1965

INQUIRING EYE

Hofer noted about her work: "I don't like to spy on people. I want them to know I'm taking their picture and want them to collaborate with me." What evidence can you see that the women shown here are aware of Hofer's presence? How might the photograph be different if Hofer had taken it without their knowledge?

ART & PLACE

What might this photograph tell you about Washington, D.C. in the 1960s?

ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Look for opportunities to photograph people in your own city or town. What kinds of individuals could help convey the character or feel of that place? Will you make potential subjects aware of the fact that you are taking their picture? Why or why not?



Boots Repaired, Dublin, 1966

INQUIRING EYE

Which details within this photograph stand out to you? What mood does the image suggest?

Now, consider these comments by photographer Elise Kirk:

All photographs inevitably deal in time, but there are so many reminders in this one. The clock and the calendar, the signage imploring us not to delay our errands, and the years passed already in the aging plaster and wood. Then there is the dog – now long gone – but held here forever in a late morning pause, while the city likely marches on just outside the frame.

Do Kirk's observations align with what you took away from the image?

ART & PLACE

British author V.S. Pritchett wrote the text of the photobook in which this image was published. Consider what Pritchett had to say about Dublin in the text: “But, with all the changes, this is still a place for simple pleasures. Time does not exist, night turns into day, cars stream by until the small hours [...]”

Do you see any resonance between Pritchett’s comments and this photograph?

ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Choose a photograph you have taken of a place you know well. Write a few sentences to accompany the image and expand on what it has to say about that place.



*Coney Island Shooting Gallery,
New York, 1965*

INQUIRING EYE

While fine art photography of the 1960s was typically made in black-and-white, Hofer embraced color film. What do you notice about color in this photograph?

ART & PLACE

People can have different ideas about how to visually communicate what a particular place is like. Some critics felt that Hofer’s photographs of New York, like this view of Coney Island, failed to capture the energy of the city’s streets. Do you agree? Why or why not?

ARTIST AS OBSERVER

Take a photograph that uses color in an interesting way to convey the character of a place.

AFTER VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

Stop in to the photography galleries (adjacent to the featured exhibition galleries) to view the *Cities are for People* exhibition, which highlights works by street photographers who were active at the same time as Hofer. What strikes you about their photographs?

Challenge students to take a trip to an unfamiliar place. The trip doesn’t need to be grand – a bus ride to a new part of town would work. Have students spend time getting a feel for this new place before planning and taking a series of photographs that capture their impressions of it.

IMAGE CREDITS

Except where noted, all images by Evelyn Hofer (American, born Germany, 1922 – 2009).

Thames Bridge, London, 1962. Gelatin silver print, 11 3/4 x 14 7/16 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2020.7.69.

Headwaiter, Garrick Club, London, 1962. Gelatin silver print, 14 3/8 x 11 5/8 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2019.39.5.

Harlem Church, New York, 1964. Dye transfer print, 16 5/8 x 13 5/16 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2016.75.109.

Lee Friedlander (American, born 1934), *New York City*, 1963; printed 2006. Gelatin silver print, 8 1/2 x 12 7/8 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2011.21.18.

Secretaries in Rawlins Park, Washington, DC, 1965. Gelatin silver print, 14 9/16 x 11 5/8 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2020.7.65.

Boots Repaired, Dublin, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 14 5/16 x 11 5/16 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2020.7.41.

Coney Island Shooting Gallery, New York, 1965. Dye transfer print, 16 13/16 x 13 3/16 in. Gift of the Hall Family Foundation, 2020.7.46.