

Jonathan Becker: Lost Time

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for scheduling a visit to see the exhibition *Jonathan Becker: Lost Time*, featuring the work of celebrated photographer Jonathan Becker. We are excited to share these thoughtful and dynamic photographs with you and your students. Viewing this collection of photographs that span over 50 years provides a window into many iconic figures and moments in recent history. What can we discover about a subject by closely examining their portrait? How has the photographer captured these frozen moments? What role does photography play in memory and thinking about the passage of time?

While most students today are very familiar with taking photographs of friends, themselves, and their surroundings using cell phones, this exhibition challenges them to see portraiture and photography in new ways and take what they discover back to their own photography. School tours will focus on elements of portraiture including gesture, expression, pose, setting, and narrative. Students will also investigate photographic concepts of perspective, lighting, composition, and scale. All tours include a photography-related art making experience in The Pollack Family Learning Center.

Before your students arrive:

- Discuss how your students engage with photography in their own lives. Why do they take photos? What do they like to take pictures of? Where do they see photos? Why do they look at pictures?
- Ask them what the title *Lost Time* means to them. What is being lost? How might this idea relate to the role of photography in our lives?

This packet of materials is intended to help prepare your students for their visit. It is designed with upper elementary school students in mind; please adjust for your grade level. Look for this light bulb to indicate ideas for older students. Please share the materials with all classroom and art teachers.



The following are included:

- Introduction and Biographical information about the artists
- Images from the exhibition with discussion questions
- Pre-visit activities
- Glossary
- Post-visit activities

The KMA Education Department welcomes collaborative planning for class visits. Please email madasko@katonahmuseum.org or call 914-232-9555, ext. 2969 to discuss the specifics of your tour. Thank you for choosing the KMA for your class visit.

Margaret Adasko
Curator of Education

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Katonah Museum of Art

Introduction to the Exhibition

Jonathan Becker's photographs span a period of half a century. His personal engagement with his subjects poignantly reflects and records a wider, shifting history. The twentieth century was the first to be described as an age of photography defined by the verve and innovation of photographers like Brassai. Becker's beginnings, and the start of this exhibition, at the home of Brassai, define why his roots are firmly planted in the associations of an earlier era.

Becker has moved through the widest social strata, from presidential suites to artists' studios. His pictures appeared in American magazines during the golden age of print. The artist acknowledges the support he received from such luminaries as Bea Feitler, Frank Zachary, Slim Aarons, Diana Vreeland, and Graydon Carter and it is from this world that Becker's pictures have been drawn. Here, they exist as fine, framed prints that exude layers of craftsmanship and artistry. Our digital age is marked by the rapidity with which photographs are seized and consumed. Becker's view suggests a more measured consideration of who and what lies before his lens.

Central to photography is the sense of time. The camera freezes time, reducing it to a fraction of a second that can define a lifetime. Time, of course, is unstoppable: its passage is what makes photographs so memorable and every This exhibition hinges on this sense of time's passage. Marcel Proust, a writer Brassai admired greatly, regarded his series of seven novels, *la Search of Last Teme*, as a single great photograph. It is from Proust's title that Becker's exhibition and his book are similarly named and from which they derive their resonance.

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Jonathan Becker in his Bedford Hills, New York, studio, 2021. Photograph © Benjamin Chapman.

About the Artist: Jonathan Becker:

Jonathan Becker is a celebrated photographer and Bedford resident. For five decades, he has been a premier chronicler of the worlds of art, fashion and literature, like Marcel Proust equipped with a camera instead of a pen. A protégé of legendary Parisian photographer Brassai, Becker served as a long-time contributor to *Vanity Fair*. His black-and-white and color photographs portray the brilliant and the beautiful in their natural habitats, from the Brooklyn Academy of Music to Elaine's, the legendary Upper East Side bar and restaurant. On the walls of our exhibition, artists like Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and John Chamberlain mingle with fashion icons like Diana Vreeland, André Leon Talley, and Grace Jones. Capturing the spontaneous gestures of his subjects, Becker's camera and flash engrave indelible portraits in black-and-white, recalling the dramatic chiaroscuro of Rembrandt's etchings. In contrast, his color photographs emphasize hue and texture, making abstract compositions from the spattered paint on the floor of Jackson Pollock's studio or the typewriter keys and cigarette

stubs on the desk of the journalist and novelist Ward Just. Depicting the doyennes of high society, Becker piles pattern on pattern and color on color, translating their fabulous lifestyles into synesthetic reverie. Tragedy and heartbreak may lurk around the margins, but for 1/60th of a second, they are banished in favor of beauty and pleasure.

Our exhibition featuring more than 50 black-and-white and color photos has been organized by Guest Curator, Mark Holborn in conjunction with a new publication (also titled *Jonathan Becker: Lost Time*). The book, which will be released in October 2024, is also edited by Holborn and includes over 200 images from across Becker's career, charting his journeys in New York, Paris, London, and Buenos Aires from the 1970s to the 2010s.

Jonathan Becker was born in Manhattan in 1955. His mother was a Martha Graham protégé who became a successful choreographer on Broadway and in Hollywood. His father was a drama critic and film distributor credited with bringing European film to American audiences. Growing up he was surrounded and influenced by artists, actors, directors, dancers, and singers. By the time he was 26 years old, he had developed a reputation as a portrait photographer working for Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine. In 1981, Becker received his first big break from Bea Feitler, the late art director of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Rolling Stone* magazine. Feitler asked Becker to submit prints for the relaunch of *Vanity Fair* magazine. The prints that Becker submitted were from one of his many trips to Paris and included portraits of Brassai. Becker was recognized for his visual storytelling and *Vanity Fair* kept him on, marking the start of his forty-year career there. In addition to his *Vanity Fair* responsibilities, Becker served as the lead photographer for the Rockefeller Foundation, documenting their philanthropic efforts across five continents. In 2021, Becker turned his Bedford Hills storage space into a working studio where he is currently transforming some of his iconic prints into museum quality prints in limited editions.

Brassai, born Gyula Halász (1899-1984), was an acclaimed French-Hungarian photographer, sculptor, printmaker, writer, and filmmaker. He quickly gained fame for his impressive photographs, in which he documented Parisian life in the twentieth century. Brassai is perhaps best known for his ability to blur the lines between street photography and fine art.

Brassai once famously declared, "Only powerfully conceived images have the ability to penetrate the memory." Becker shares this sentiment as is evident in his photos.



Images for Discussion – *Portrait Photography*

Carefully look at the photograph above.

Describe the subject

Describe the characteristics of the subject.

Look at her pose and her hand. What do you infer about the subject from this pose?

Look at the expression on her face. How is she feeling?

Look at her dress and accessories. How would you describe her style?

Describe the Setting

Look at the woman's surroundings. What do you notice? Describe some details.

Describe the colors and tones of the room.

Look at the lighting. Where is it coming from?

What might the surroundings tell us about this woman?

Beyond the Photo

What do you guess the personality of this individual might be? What aspect of this photo makes you think that?

Imagine the photographer who took this. What do you think he thought of the subject? What makes you say that?



What inferences can you make about this individual and her life from looking at the information in the picture? What additional information would you need to confirm your inferences?

Jonathan Becker
The Duchess of Alba at home, Seville, 2010
Archival pigment on rag
58 x 58 inches
Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker



Images for Discussion – *Photographic Choices*

Describe what's going on in this photograph.

- Who do you see?
- What is happening?
- Where is this taking place?

Consider many of the photographer's choices as he prepared to take this photo. Use the glossary to help define these terms.

Point of view (vantage point): From where did the photographer take the shot? (From above, below, the side, or an angle?) How does the vantage point affect the way you read the picture?

Scale: What is large or small in this image?

Lighting: Which areas of the image are dark or light? Where is the light source?

Composition: How are elements of the image arranged within the square?

Framing: What is included in the shot and what isn't? Is anything cropped? Describe the visual impact of this choice.

Focal Point: What is the center of interest in this picture? What's happening around the focal point?

Foreground, Middleground, Background: Describe what is in each area of the picture.

Zoomed in or Zoomed out? How close or far away do you feel to the subject in this image? How much background and space do you see?

Now that you have analyzed this photograph, take a step back to look at it as a whole.

What feeling does this picture give you?

What do you think the artist is trying to make us think about?

Does this photograph remind you of a memory from your own life?

Jonathan Becker
Sebastian Becker, St. Peter's Basilica, The Vatican, 1995
Archival pigment on rag
58 x 58 inches
Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker



Images for Discussion – *Analyzing a Photograph*

What's happening in this photograph?

Describe the people in this photograph.

How are they interacting with each other?

Look at their facial expressions and poses. What emotions are they expressing?

What are they wearing? Describe the details you see.

How might they be connected to or related to each other?

Describe the scene.

Where is this taking place?

Where might they be?

What's going on?

Imagine there were thought bubbles or talk bubbles for the people in this photo.

What would they say?

If this was just one still in an ongoing narrative, what might happen next?

What makes you think that?

Tell a short story about what might have happened before or after this photo was taken.

Personal Connections:

What does this remind you of?

Have you ever experienced a similar moment?

Jonathan Becker
Dennis Hopper at home with Family, Venice, California 2010
Archival pigment on rag
28 x 28 inches
Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker

Pre-Visit: Feelings and Moods

How can feelings and moods be expressed through photography? Consider the facial expression, pose, and surroundings. Match the word with the picture it best relates. Discuss why.



exhausted
thoughtful
proud
annoyed
powerful



_____ (make up your own word to describe the last one)



Discuss synonyms for the expressive words listed above

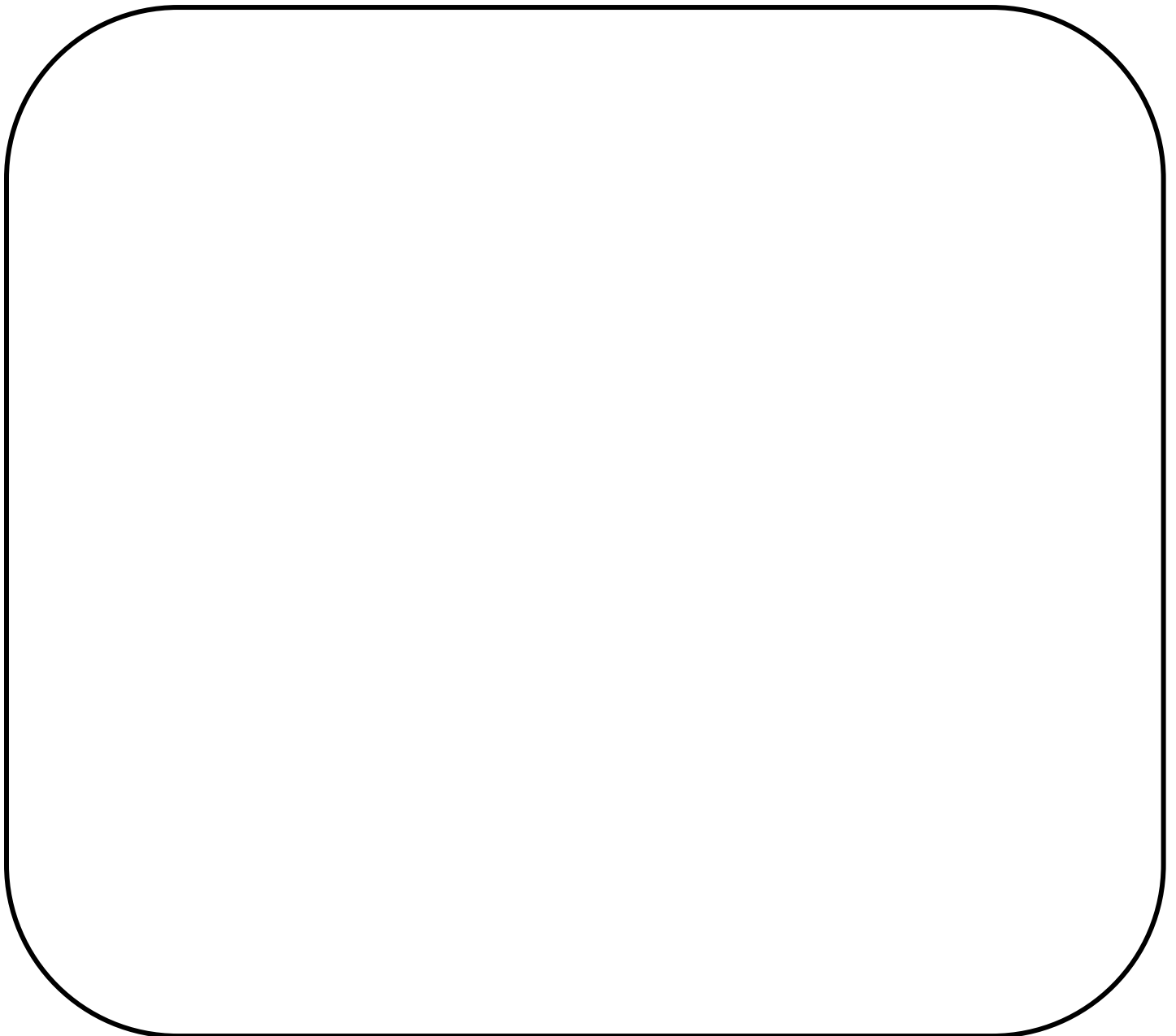
Image credits, clockwise: Jonathan Becker, *Diane von Furstenberg at home, Cloudwalk, Connecticut*, 198. Archival pigment on rag. 28 x 28 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker. Jonathan Becker, *Charles, HRH The Prince of Wales at home, Highgrove, Gloucestershire, England*, 2010. Archival pigment on rag. 44 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker. Jonathan Becker, *Millicent Fenwick at home, Bernardsville, New Jersey* 1990. Archival pigment on rag. 44 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker. Jonathan Becker, *Elaine's Kitchen – Andy Warhol and Elaine, New York*, 1979. Archival pigment on rag. 44 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker. Jonathan Becker, *Patricia Herrera at home, New York*, 2001. Archival pigment on rag. 28 x 28 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker. Jonathan Becker, *André Leon Talley, Chevalier d l'Ordre des arts et des lettres, on the Pont Alexandre III, Paris, 30 June 2013, 2013*. Archival pigment on rag. 44 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist © Jonathan Becker

Pre-Visit: From Words to Image

Read or listen to the scene described below. Can you picture it? Draw what your mind sees.

When you come to the Museum, see if you can find this photograph.

Her eyes are prominent, large, and bulging. They tell the story of a lifetime of experiences, loss, contemplation, and challenges. Her gaze is directed down and gently off to the side, not meeting our eyes. Her fingertips, bracing upon the sides of her head, suggest she is deep in thought. She tightly closes her lips, keeping her thoughts to herself. We can only guess what's on her mind by her expression. We see the impact of the years on her face. Her cheeks are drooping, there are age lines on her forehead and the bridge of her nose. The bags under her eyes communicate age and a weary tiredness. Wisps of white hair frame her face. All we can see of her clothing is the slightly wrinkled collar of a blazer and the lacy edge of a dark blouse underneath. The enormity of this print suggests greatness, importance, and power to the subject and her life accomplishments despite her somewhat stoic expression.



Considering Photography



Read the below excerpt from Susan Sontag, *On Photography* and discuss and write about the following questions.

The consequences of lying have to be more central for photography than they ever can be for painting, because the flat, usually rectangular images which are photographs make a claim to be true that paintings could never make. A fake painting (one whose attribution is false) falsifies the history of art. A fake photograph (one which has been retouched or tampered with, or whose caption is false) falsifies reality. The history of photography could be recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification, which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling, which is measured not only by a notion of value-free truth, a legacy from the sciences, but by a moralized ideal of truth-telling adapted from nineteenth-century literary models and from the (then) new profession of independent journalism” (Sontag, 86).

According to Susan Sontag, what’s the difference between photography and paintings?

Do you disagree or agree with Sontag’s statement about truth-telling? Why or why not?

How do these ideas apply to photos we see today? How has it changed in recent times?

Suggested Post-Visit Activities

Photos from Home

Have your students bring in an old photograph from home. Switch with a partner. Have the partners describe each other's photograph to each other. Then, have the owner of the photograph explain the photograph themselves. When and where was it taken? Who may be in it? What does it mean to you? Is there a story behind it?

- Compare: How did your answers differ from each other?
 - Make a Venn diagram of both of your reactions to the photo
- What does this say about photography in general?

Be your own Subject!

Let your students pick how they would like to be photographed. What story do they want to tell about themselves? Encourage the students to pick something unexpected to include in their photo. Students can decide their pose, expression, and what they might be holding or doing. Students can also choose the lighting, location, and photographic perspective. After you take the picture, print out one copy in color and one in black and white.

- Discuss why the student chose their pose, expression, and objects.
- What does their photo reveal about themselves and what does it leave out?
- How does the same photo feel different in color versus without?

Be your own Photographer!

Go on an adventure with your students around the school. Depending on your materials and the age of your kids, decide what camera they will use (possibilities include iPads, cell phone, or disposable cameras). Let each student take a photo of something that interests them through the walk. Consider perspective, angle, zoom, framing, and lighting as they plan their photos. When finished, print their photos in black-and-white. Try one of these ideas to expand on this activity:

- Write a caption or story about the image.
- Draw, collage, or paint into the black-and-white images.
- Print multiple copies of each photo and have students create a collage using their photos.
- After they finish, play reverse show-and-tell with their photos. Each student will share their final project, and the other students tell the creator the story of their photograph.

Jonathan Becker: *Lost Time*

Glossary

Your Museum Visit:

Museum: An institution or building where works of art or other objects of value are cared for, studied, and displayed so the public can experience and learn from them.

Curator: A person who selects, organizes, and presents objects for display.

Docent: A knowledgeable guide, especially one who leads visitors through a museum and facilitates a discussion about the exhibition.

Art and Ideas:

Background: The area or scenery behind the main object or subject. The area of a photograph farthest away from the photographer when the picture was taken.

Camera: A device used to create photographs, a dark box with a small opening through which light enters. Camera controls admit an amount of light (the aperture control) through an opening (lens) for a certain amount of time (shutter control) to create an exposure on light-sensitive film, which is then processed using chemicals to create a lasting image on film, paper, or other surfaces.

Candid / Posed: To what degree were subjects captured in a spontaneous moment or directed by the photographer or someone else.

Composition: The arrangement of elements in a work of art.

Cropping: Purposely cutting off part of an image from the final photograph.

Depth of Field: The distance between the nearest and the furthest objects that are in focus.

Environment: The surroundings or conditions in which the person or subject of the image is located.

Expression: A look on someone's face that conveys a particular emotion. Also, the process of making known one's thoughts or feelings.

Exterior scene: A photograph taken outside.

Focal Point: A place in a photograph that your eye is drawn to, usually an important area made to stand out.

Focus: In photography, focus refers to the clarity or lack of clarity of different elements in view.

Foreground: The area or scenery nearest to the viewer when the photograph was taken.

Framing: Using the camera lens to include and exclude information.

Gesture: An expressive movement of the body or part of the body that communicates an idea, feeling, or meaning.

Gaze: A steady or intent look in one's eyes. The gaze in a portrait can show feeling or emotion.

Interior scene: A photograph taken inside.

Lighting: In photography, lighting refers to how light is seen within the image. One may consider what is the light source in the image - natural or artificial, the position or direction of the light source, the strength of light, and how it affects the mood and feeling of the image.

Middleground: The area between the background and foreground.

Mood: A feeling or state of mind.

Narrative (art): Art that tells a story.

Perspective: Point of view or sense of proportion.

Photograph: An image rendered by light and recorded onto a light-sensitive surface, typically using a camera.

Photography: The word literally means 'drawing with light.' The art, craft, and process or practice of creating an image through the use of a camera, either film or digital.

Point of view (vantage point): The photographer's perspective, created by how the photographer is positioned when taking the picture (e.g. eye-level or birds-eye view).

Portrait: A representation of a person. Portraits usually show what a person looks like as well as revealing something about the subject's character.

Pose: A particular way of standing or sitting, usually adopted in order to be photographed, painted, or drawn.

Proportion: The relationship in size or shape between one thing and the whole image.

Scale: A representation or comparison of size.

Self Portrait: A representation of oneself.

Setting: The place or type of surroundings where something is positioned or where an event takes place.

Shadow: A dark image cast on the ground or other surface by an object blocking light. Also, shade or comparative darkness in an area.

Silhouette: The solid outline of a shape, often the shape of a person.

Sitter: The person who is posing for his or her portrait.

Subject: A person or thing that is being discussed, described, or photographed.

Symmetry: When the same lines, shapes, or patterns exist on opposite sides of a dividing line.

Viewfinder: A tool that shows the field of view, used in framing and focusing the picture.

Zoom (in/out): Refers to how close up or far away the subject of the image appears.