

Shiprock (from the series Fire and Ice)
Joan Myers (American, born 1944)
2012 (printed before 2014)
pigment print
Gift of Joan Myers, 2017
Object number: 2017.5.9

The invention of photography in 1827 changed how we view and understand many different aspects of our world. Among these was how we understood places that we may never see in person. If someone mentions the pyramids at Giza, what springs to mind probably isn't a verbal or written description of the pyramids, or even a mental picture created by those words. What probably springs to mind is something like a *National Geographic* cover featuring a photograph of the pyramids. Early landscape photography tended to be understood as an accurate reporting of what a place looked like. This more documentary approach to photographing places was generally regarded as trustworthy and fueled the imagination and curiosity of the viewer. That *National Geographic* cover didn't lead you to question whether the pyramids were shaped like that but may have encouraged you to see them in person one day or prompted you to wonder about the story of their construction.

Photography's relationship to landscape has continued to change over time with a range of aesthetic approaches and ideas about what landscape photography should be. Looking at a few of these changes may help us understand the changing perspectives of the land around us. The perspectives of the photographic landscape we'll look at inform not only how humans view the land, but also their own relationship with that land.

Modern artists found inspiration in landscapes ranging from urban street scenes to mountain ranges. In the United States, landscape photography outside the city assumed an idealized view of wilderness, one that showed the landscape as unspoiled and without human influence. This depiction of the land came from a European view that often focused on the American West as a land that was waiting to be explored, missing the fact that indigenous people had already lived there for untold generations. This romanticized view of a landscape was beginning to fade into myth and memory as cities and highway systems grew across the

country and found an eager audience. In some cases it became a part of the early environmental movement with groups like the Sierra Club.

Activity:

In the previous section we looked at some concepts that can be found in landscape photography, now let's address some techniques for making landscape photographs.

Horizon Lines

Most, but by no means all, landscape photographs have a horizon line. For images that do include a horizon, the question is where to put it in your composition. There are some common ways to deal with the horizon, but no rules that anyone has to follow. It's not unusual for a horizon line to align with the rule of thirds in a composition, meaning that the horizon will be either a third of the way up from the bottom of the image, or a third of the way down from the top of the image. Usually this creates a good visual balance between the sky and the land, with whichever is more important for the image occupying the larger area. If the landscape you are

photographing has a flat horizon, such as a corn field or a line of similar roofs in a city, arranging the horizon to line up with the rule of thirds seems pretty easy, but what do you do with a horizon that is far from flat or straight? Sometimes the angle of buildings or landforms makes a flat horizon impossible or just not that interesting. When using the rule of thirds for a jagged city skyline or a line of mountains, it's perfectly acceptable to have some elements above and below that imaginary line. Use the line as a guide, and see if arranging elements above and below it roughly equally looks good. If something doesn't look quite right, try tilting the image up or down to change where the horizon line lands. Remember, these are guidelines you can experiment with, not laws you must follow to the letter.

There are times when your landscape doesn't really need much actual land in it, or sky for that matter. Often this is the case when having more sky or earth will detract from the focus of the image. In some instances, a photographer may choose to eliminate the sky all together and only focus on the earth. In the case of the sky or elements that rise above the ground needing to be the focus, many photographers will still include a small strip of the ground at the bottom of the image to keep the composition anchored. When leaving a little land at the bottom of the image, consider how much is necessary for that strip to make sense in the context of the rest of the image. A great example of this kind of composition can be found in Anne Noggle's *Untitled (Gravel Chute)*. The low angle of the image frames the white industrial building between the dark, swirling clouds above and the clouds of dust at its base. At the very bottom, though, we see a barbed wire fence line with tall grass and weeds



Diablo Canyon, Santa Fe County, New Mexico



Guadalupe Mountains, Southeastern New Mexico

beneath it. These last elements keep the building from simply floating in the clouds, while adding clues about the kind of building or location where the photograph was taken.



Untitled (Gravel Chute)
Anne Noggle (American, 1922 - 2005)
circa 1963–69
gelatin silver print
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Pease, 1976
Object number: 3445.23PH

In some types of photography, such as portraiture, placing an important element in the center of the image can make for an awkward composition. In landscape images, placing the horizon line in the center of the image can work well if it creates balance or a deliberate visual tension. Look at the content of your frame both for what is there in terms of importance and for how those elements relate to each other visually. For example, in Patrick Nagatani's photograph *Gila River, Canal Camp, Japanese-American Concentration Camp, Arizona, March 25, 1995 / GRC-4-18-24*, the horizon line is close to the center of the image. The remains of the Japanese-American concentration camp feel both emotionally and visually heavy. Giving the open sky equal space in the composition helps to balance the image and to give the viewer space to consider the camp's remains and their implications. *Wheatfield* by Lawrence McFarland similarly divides the composition, balancing the strong lines in the wind-swept wheat on the bottom and the rounded shapes of the cloud covered sky above.



GILA RIVER, CANAL CAMP, JAPANESE-AMERICAN CONCENTRATION CAMP, ARIZONA, MARCH 25, 1995 / GRC-4-18-24

PATRICK NAGATANI

AP

Gila River, Canal Camp, Japanese-American Concentration Camp, Arizona,
March 25, 1995 / GRC-4-18-24
(from the series Japanese American Concentration Camps)
Patrick Nagatani (American, 1945 - 2017)
March 25, 1995
chromogenic print
Gift of Patrick Nagatani, 2017
Object number: 2017.12.62



Wheatfield
Lawrence McFarland (American, born 1942)
1976
gelatin silver print, selenium toned
Museum purchase, 1983
Object number: 1983.40.3

Moving the viewer through the image



Santa Fe County, New Mexico



San Juan County, New Mexico

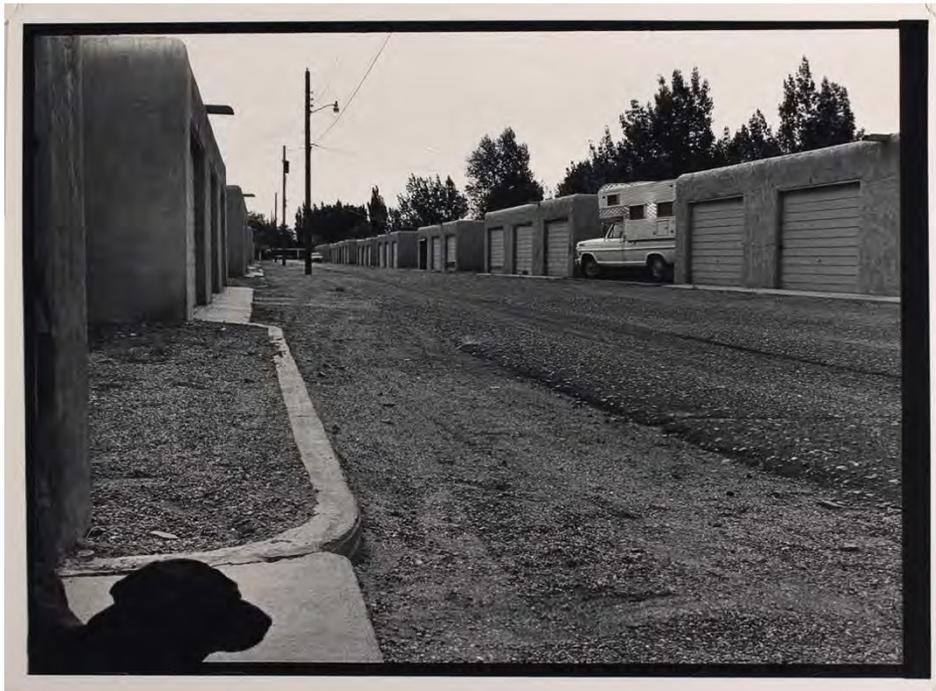
How a viewer will visually move through your image may not be the first thing on your mind when composing your scene of a mountain vista or an old drive-in movie theatre sign on a small rural highway, but it is something to consider. An image can be easier to explore when elements, such as lines, lead the view through the scene. When framing a composition, pause to observe how your eye moves through the landscape. Did your eye rest somewhere you didn't like? Did you easily work your way through the image? Did you come to rest on the most important element in the image? If you don't like the way your eyes moved through the image or where you found your attention drawn, try changing the composition a little. Lines, both literal such as the stripes on a roadway or implied such as following someone's gaze, can create a kind of visual pathway to move the viewer's attention around the frame. Elements that don't relate visually to the rest of the image can act like roadblocks to how you move through an image.

Joan Myers and Anne Noggle lead the viewer through their images extremely well in the images below. In her image *Shiprock*, Myers places a large rock in the center foreground which could put a halt to the viewer if it weren't for the strong relationship that the stone has with Shiprock in the right background and the long stone wall to the left. The foreground stone is similar in shape to Shiprock and echoes its appearance in color and lighting. The long stone wall likewise relates to the stone in color and lighting but connects with Shiprock because of the line formed by the top of the wall. All of these elements combine to create a triangular composition that moves the viewer around the entire image. In *Untitled (Garage Doors)*, Noggle uses both implied and literal lines to move the viewer throughout the image. The roof lines, power lines and curbs of the image bring us from the right foreground through the image towards the left background. If these were the only lines, it would be easy for us to overlook the left foreground of the image. There, Noggle has placed a dog's head in silhouette, creating an implied gaze. The dog seems to be looking towards the truck with a camper on the opposite side of the street, which stands out as break in the repeated forms of the garages and feels

like a bright spot in the image, moving us between light and shadow as we move between the camper and the dog.



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Untitled (Garage Doors)
Anne Noggle (American, 1922 - 2005)
1970
gelatin silver print
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Pease, 1976
Object number: 3428.23PH

1. Keeping these compositional techniques in mind, try to make three distinctly different kinds of landscape photographs, such as those discussed earlier. See if you can make each of these during your normal day, although making a special trip to create an image that pops into your head certainly isn't discouraged. Walking to school, work, or the local park will work just fine, though.

2. Create a landscape photograph of the natural environment. See how much evidence of human presence you can leave out of the image. This landscape can be big, or it can be small, which may make leaving out signs of human beings easier, especially if you live in a city.
3. Compose a landscape that shows nature and the built environment interacting. Thinking big or little in this case could help you create some very different, and very interesting images.
4. Create a landscape image that is entirely about the environment created by humans. This can be a cityscape or an urban landscape, but it doesn't have to be. Interpret "environment created by humans" however it makes sense to you.