ACCOMMODATING NATURE: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF FRANK GOHLKE
Teacher’s Guide to the Exhibition

On view at the ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART
April 12–July 13, 2008

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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FREE GROUP TOURS for up to 55 students are available on a first-come, first-served basis: TUESDAY–FRIDAY, 10AM–4PM
PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS:
TUESDAY–SATURDAY 10AM–5PM & SUNDAY 1–5PM
Admission to the museum is always free!
Organizing Your Group Visit to the Addison

The Teacher Guide
The ideas and questions in this Guide are intended to simulate the teaching approach of the Addison education staff using images from the exhibition to inspire conversation and projects.

Museum Visits
Visits are inquiry-based and shaped by teacher objectives and student interests.

Students and teachers are encouraged to engage with the artwork they see in the museum by:
- discussing and sharing ideas
- responding to and posing questions
- making connections with their own lives

Before Your Visit
mention that students will need to keep in mind the following:
- stay with the group
- raise hands to ask or answer questions
- no touching the artwork or the walls
- no running
- no food or gum

How to Arrange a Visit
At least two weeks in advance, contact Amy Freedberg at 978.749.4037 or afreedberg@andover.edu with possible dates for your visit (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 AM – 4 PM).

Visits range from 45 – 90 minutes. We can accommodate up to 55 students at one time. Group tours are always free of charge.

© 1978 Frank Gohlke (b. 1942), Oakland Lake Park, Oakland Gardens, Queens, New York 2004, gelatin silver print, collection of the artist
My feeling for landscape was born in the backseat of the family car, in the frustration of a young boy who wanted to stop and explore what he saw out the window far more often than his family was willing to allow.

—Frank Gohlke (from the exhibition catalogue)

For over thirty years, photographer Frank Gohlke (b. 1942, Wichita Falls, Texas) has used his camera to explore a variety of landscapes and the relationships that people have with them. Showing scenes from Texas and Kansas to Minnesota and Washington to New York and Massachusetts, Gohlke's photographs remind us that landscapes are always changing—either through the work of people or due to acts of nature.

Although Gohlke abruptly abandoned his graduate studies in English literature to turn his attention to photography, he never completely relinquished the pen. He writes extensively—using childhood memories and his own photographs as inspiration—to express in words his ideas about the landscapes that catch his eye. (Essays by Gohlke are included in the exhibition catalogue.)

Warm-Up Exercise

Frank Gohlke’s photographs often picture the extraordinary details that might go unnoticed in a seemingly ordinary place.

- Make a list of five sights that you see every day in your neighborhood.
- Then go for a walk in your neighborhood and write down five things that you have never noticed before.

In This Guide...

The questions and activities in this guide are designed to help students explore Gohlke’s work and to come to new understandings about their own environments and their relationships to them following three themes:

Interactions Between People and Nature

The Power of Nature

The Changing Landscape

Taking inspiration from Gohlke’s own use of photography and writing, the guide includes ideas for photography and writing projects to do in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition.
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND NATURE

With photographs ranging in subject from towering grain elevators in the Midwest to a lone woman watering the dry soil of her Mississippi garden, to a Texas neighborhood restored to pristine condition after a destructive tornado to the re-growth of the forests surrounding the Mount St. Helens volcano, Frank Gohlke reveals some of the countless ways that people and nature engage in a dynamic and complex relationship. Whether people use nature’s resources for their own consumption, attempt to control nature for human benefit, or live amidst its inspiring beauty, nature always responds, sometimes cooperatively and sometimes destructively—and often unpredictably.

© 1975 Frank Gohlke (b. 1942), Grain elevator and lightning flash, Lamesa, Texas 1975, gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 in.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What evidence of nature do you see in this photograph? What evidence of people do you see?
- How do you imagine the ways that people live and work in this place and why?
- How have people in this place directed nature to their benefit? In what ways is nature directing them?
- How do you interact with your city/landscape? How does your environment impact the way you live (e.g. do you walk, ride in a car on a bicycle? do you see mostly buildings or trees? do you spend time in nature?)

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Go for a walk in your neighborhood or near your school. Write down all of the natural features you see around you. Then write down all of the features created by people. Write a poem or essay about how these natural and human-made features coexist and/or the tension between them.

Imagine that you live in a different environment (examples: if you live in the city, imagine living in a rural area, if you live in the suburbs, imagine you live in the city, etc.). Write an essay about how your environment would look different and how it would affect some of the everyday activities of your life.
Many of Frank Gohlke’s photographs show nature’s incredible power. Despite the efforts of individuals and communities to direct nature for human benefit, nature invariably prevails – the volcano erupts, a tornado sweeps through a town, seasonal changes make places uninhabitable or unforgiving.

© 1983 Frank Gohlke (b. 1942), Aerial view: looking southeast over Windy Ridge and visitors parking lot, 4.5 miles northeast of Mount St. Helens, Washington 1983, gelatin silver print, 20 x 24 in., Collection of the artist

**Observation Questions**

- How does Gohlke show the power of nature in this photograph? What do you think has happened here?
- Why might Gohlke be interested in this particular view of this location—and how did he get this view?
- What types of natural disasters have you heard or read about that have significantly changed people’s lives? (examples: tornado, volcano, hurricane, heat wave, earthquake) Where in the country or world have they occurred?
- How does the geography and climate of where people live affect their lives?
- Have you ever been reminded of nature’s power in your own life? What in your community might remind you of this?

**Related Activities**

Research news stories and photographs of the aftermath of a natural disaster to discover how people rebuild and/or reorganize their lives.

Select a location outside your school or home to watch carefully through the spring—making notes, drawings, and/or photographs—to see how things grow, change, get clean/dirty, appear/disappear, etc. Make a poster or book that documents the changes, adding why you think they occurred. Option: share your work with the school or public.

Go to GoogleEarth and view Mount St. Helens to see how it looks today as compared with Frank Gohlke’s pictures from the 1990s.
Landscapes are always changing. Frank Gohlke is fascinated by these changes, both those that occur subtly and slowly over time and those that come drastically as a result of natural disasters. His photographs often reveal signs of change and remind us that every landscape is affected both by people and by nature.

In a pair of photographs of Gohlke’s hometown of Wichita Falls, Texas, we see in the first photograph changes in the landscape as a result of a tornado’s strike—houses flattened, cars destroyed, trees without leaves. The second photograph, however, shows the determination of a community to respond quickly by restoring many parts of the town to its former state.

Observation Questions

• How does this pair of photographs show the changes in the landscape over fourteen months?
• How do you think it was restored to the condition we see on the right?
• How do you imagine that this location might look in five, ten, twenty years from when it was photographed?
• How do some of Gohlke’s series of photographs show the short and long-term affects of natural disasters?
• What signs of change do you see in your own community? Are these changes brought on more often by nature or by people? Are the changes positive or negative? for people? for the environment?
• Are there changes that you can make to affect your community in a positive way?

Related Activities

How do you impact your environment? Write an essay about the ways in which what your life has an effect on your immediate city/landscape and/or environment.

Make a list of different ways that people in your area can be more sensitive to their impact on their city/landscape and environment. Choose one of these and design a poem, play, poster, photo essay, or public service announcement that educates other students in your school and people in your community about what they can do. Option: present your work to the school, parents, and/or public.
For the past twelve years, we have collaborated with educators to develop projects inspired by Addison exhibitions that give students the opportunity to explore and express their ideas about themselves and their community through words and photographs. Projects can be designed to suit the age level of your students, and we are glad to work with you to design a project to meet your curricular goals. Below are some project theme ideas inspired by Accommodating Nature: The Photographs of Frank Gohlke and outline of a possible photography and writing project.

**Project Theme Ideas**

**Your Landscape**
Students explore and understand the ways in which they interact with their immediate landscape. How do you impact your environment through your daily actions, such as playing sports, picking up litter, gardening, recycling, riding in a car? Student photographs and writing can be shared with the school and community to raise awareness about how everyone impacts their own environment.

**Memory of a Place**
Students make photographs of a place they feel connected to or associate with a particular memory and use the images to inspire a memoir/personal narrative writing exercise.

**Ecology Study**
Students select a nearby landscape to photograph and study. What types of plant and animal life can you see evidence of and record? How can you photograph the climate and geography? What else effects the ecology of the site? Combining their photographs with written observations, students can write reports, make presentations, or create an exhibit to share their findings and suggestions about caring for the community’s environment.

**Project Outline**

1. **Brainstorming and photography planning**
   Based on the theme selected for the project, students brainstorm ideas about what they will photograph and why, thoughtfully considering how to set up their photographs in order to communicate their ideas.

2. **Making photographs**
   Students make photographs—either during the school day or at home—based on the ideas generated during the planning session.

3. **Writing from the photographs**
   Students review their photographs and select which image to use. Writing from their carefully observed photographs, students develop compelling stories or statements about their topics.

4. **Sharing student work**
   Student photos and writing together can be shared through: an exhibition in the school or community; a printed, photocopied, or one-of-a-kind book; or a special presentation to classmates, parents and/or the public. This important step in the project helps students take pride in their work and empowers them to share their ideas and values with a larger community.
The exhibition and catalogue, *Accommodating Nature: The Photographs of Frank Gohlke*, were organized by John Rohrbach and the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

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**On Frank Gohlke**

www.frankgohlke.com


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**On Contemporary American Landscape Photography**

http://americanart.si.edu/collections/exhibits/helios/homeandheaven.html

Website for *Between Home and Heaven: Contemporary American Landscape Photography* from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. (A catalogue of this collection has also been published.)

http://www.bu.edu/prc/newengland.htm

Website for *New England Survey*, a current exhibition of contemporary, New England landscape photography at the Photographic Resource Center, Boston.