

# Curriculum

## A List of Favorite Anythings

By Mark Steinmetz

"I love the South for its warmth and chaos," says photographer Mark Steinmetz, who was born in New York but now lives in Athens, Georgia. Steinmetz worked with Garry Winogrand in the 1980s and has photographed throughout the American South, as well as in Paris and various Italian cities, making silvery black-and-white images that conjure a mood of chance. For his most recent series, *ATL / Terminus* (2018), Steinmetz turned his lens on Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport—the busiest airport in the world—and its surroundings. In his pictures of this bustling hub, he gives form to the poetic ambiance of the airport as a space of coming and going, conveying the open-endedness and quiet complexity of daily life.

### Late work of Garry Winogrand

Garry Winogrand's photographs from the last years of his life—he died in 1984—strike me as being among the most interesting photographs ever made. The form becomes more unfamiliar and more scattered (shattered?); Winogrand was always loose, but these are looser yet. The mood hanging in the air over early 1980s Los Angeles is elegiac. Perhaps on some unconscious level he knew there was a cancer raging in his body.

### The Century of Titian: The Golden Age of Venetian Painting, 1993

The best art exhibition I have ever seen is *The Century of Titian: The Golden Age of Venetian Painting*, held at the Grand Palais, in Paris, in 1993. Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione painted the most sublime images of human beings that I know of. A nocturnal scene by Jacopo Tintoretto of Christ praying in the olive grove was made with impressionistic strokes and fauvist colors hundreds of years before those movements took place in France.

### Vic Chesnutt and Benjamin Smoke

Vic Chesnutt was raised in Zebulon, Georgia, and began to write songs at the age of five. A car accident at eighteen left him partially paralyzed. Most of his songwriting took place in Athens, Georgia (my adopted hometown). In "Panic Pure," Chesnutt sings: "My earliest memory is of holding up a sparkler / High up to the darkest sky / Some Fourth of July spectacular / I shook it with an urgency / I'll never be able to repeat." Listen to his 1992 album *West of Rome*. Benjamin Smoke, who worked in nearby Atlanta, put out brilliant albums at about the same time as Chesnutt. He might be more searchable as the Opal Foxx Quartet. Both died too young.

### John Szarkowski, "A Different Kind of Art," 1975

This essay by John Szarkowski, published in the *New York Times* on April 13, 1975, argues with humor and grace that photography is unlike the other, more synthetic arts. He hits the nail on the head: the photographer's "entire effort is directed toward the problem of defining precisely what the subject is. This is meant not poetically but literally." I read this article every few years—it helps return me to clarity.

### Rumi, Hafiz, and Basho

The thirteenth-century Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi is among the most popular poets in America largely due to the renderings of his work by Coleman Barks, also of Athens, Georgia. I also love the ecstatic and mystical poetry of the fourteenth-century Sufi poet Hafiz—read *The Gift* (1999), translated by Daniel Ladinsky. These Persian poems are full of warmth and color. For something a little more cool and subdued, I might turn to Japan's Basho, seventeenth-century master of the haiku.

### Fra Angelico

This is really what we all want: to have an angel come down and tell us God has something in mind for us. One of my favorite versions of the Annunciation is the fifteenth-century altarpiece by Fra Angelico in Cortona, Italy, a Tuscan hill town where I spent a few seasons. The current setting of this golden masterpiece, Cortona's Museo Diocesano, is quiet and intimate—there's nothing else around to crowd the altarpiece.

### Orson Welles in his late movies

Andrew Sarris wrote of Orson Welles: "The conventional American diagnosis of his career is decline, pure and simple, but decline is never pure and never simple." In his late work—from *Touch of Evil* (1958), in which Marlene Dietrich tells Welles's character, "I didn't recognize you. You should lay off those candy bars.... You're a mess, honey," to *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), in which Welles's role is based on Shakespeare's Falstaff and Jeanne Moreau costars—Welles photographs his bloated, aging body and face in raking light and in wide-angle close-ups from high and low vantage points. Welles was a master of cinema, as well as of the fake nose.

### Old stone tools

Pretty much all of the stone tools ever made—arrowheads, axes, choppers—are still with us today, they're just buried deep in the ground somewhere. I have a small collection of chopping tools that were possibly used to remove marrow from bone. Early hominids made them by striking one side of a cobble with another rock to create a sharp edge. After perhaps a million years of working this way, our ancestors came to realize that they could turn the stone over to make a sharper, double-sided edge. These sculptural choppers ground me to the earth and connect me to the distant past.

### Pots by Michael Simon

Michael Simon is a potter who lives in Athens, Georgia (another artist working in my hometown). He was a student of the American Warren MacKenzie, who studied under the great potter Bernard Leach, who brought the Taoist stances of Japanese ceramicists to England. Simple and utilitarian, a beautiful and well-balanced cup is a joy.

### Coins of Ancient Greece

Around 400 BCE in places like Syracuse, in Sicily, and Bruttium (now Calabria), in southern Italy, coins were made with astonishing artistry. Fanciful animals and striding nudes, like little Matisse drawings, were stamped into silver and gold and used as currency. I often hear people today make the assertion that we are the most evolved generation yet, and, in some ways, maybe we are, but not in all ways.

### Late work of Eugène Atget

It cheers me to think of the elderly Eugène Atget getting up before dawn in mid-1920s Paris to take the train to the abandoned Parc de Sceaux, hauling his wooden tripod and heavy glass plates. There was no possibility for profit or acclaim (as the audience for his work hadn't arrived yet). He spent his early mornings communing with the gods in the bright, hazy light.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Fra Angelico, Cortona Annunciation, 1433-34; still from *Touch of Evil*, 1958; Eugène Atget, Parc de Sceaux, March 1925; Henri Cartier-Bresson, Henri Matisse at his home, Villa le Réve, Vence, France, February 1944; Jem Cohen, Vic Chesnutt, 2007; Garry Winogrand, Santa Monica, 1982-83



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