Art Sinsabaugh, *Midwest Landscape #29* (1961)

Trained at Chicago’s famed Institute of Design, Art Sinsabaugh (1924-1983) made his artistic breakthrough in the early 1960s with a giant “banquet” camera that produced large 12 x 20-inch negatives. He developed a unique method wherein he cropped the edges of these extra-large prints, sometimes dramatically, to emphasize the expansive horizons he saw in nature. Sinsabaugh was a landscape photographer in the broadest sense: he photographed the spaces—both rural and urban—that we inhabit.

Sinsabaugh developed sophisticated picture-making skills combined with an innate sensitivity to the visual possibilities of the American landscape. His cool, clear aesthetic has been described as a mixture of the great expansive vision of nineteenth-century landscape photographers with mid-twentieth century formalism.

*Midwest Landscape #29* is one photograph from a large series, in which Sinsabaugh sought to create an all-encompassing “census” of the American landscape—the rural farms of the Midwest, the urban cityscapes of Chicago and Baltimore, the mountains and resorts of New England, and the barren deserts of the Southwest. Rather than focusing on individual people and places, Sinsabaugh captured the rhythms of human life and our relationship to the land through the formal elements—the shapes and sometimes the silhouettes of buildings, silos, bridges, highways, homes, skyscrapers, trees, and gravestones—that punctuate our horizons. Taken as a whole, Sinsabaugh’s remarkable photographs capture a richly nuanced sense of place and the ever-changing face of the American environment.

Sinsabaugh’s photographs possess a remarkable quality of timeless beauty, while at the same time documenting a specific time and place. His straightforward, detached viewpoint and inclusion of “ordinary” scenes foreshadowed the environmental concerns of the “New Topographic” photographers of the 1970s.

The Art Sinsabaugh Archive is located at the Indiana University Art Museum.
Questions to Consider

1. What is your first impression of this photograph? How does it make you feel? What does it make you think about?
2. What sort of community do you think this is? What sorts of things do you think these people do? What clues about their way of life can you find?
3. Is this community much like your own? How does it differ and how might it be similar?
4. Describe the basic shapes that are lined up along the horizon in this photograph.
5. How does the format and the absence of color emphasize this landscape?
6. Where and when do you think this photograph was taken? Are there any hints in the image?

Connections

Art: Steiglitz, formalism, landscape, photography.
Geography: The Midwest
Mathematics: Geometry

Further Reading


Teachers’ Extensions

Work: Midwest Landscape #29 (1961)

Artist: Art Sinsabaugh

Location of work: Indiana University Art Museum (IUAM)

Works in Paper

Vocabulary/Key Concept(s):
Photography

Art Connection(s):
Photographic Landscape A picture representing natural scenery.
Formalism Any art or art criticism that emphasizes compositional elements (color, line shape, texture) over content (subject, meaning). A strict keeping to prescribed forms and an emphasis on the conventional aspects of things and the prevailing system, rather than on innovative and off-beat ideals. Formalism in Art at the beginning of the 20th century (which lasted as an attitude for more than sixty year) refers to a concern shown by artists increasingly to reject illusion in favour of an accentuation on the art-object expressed through form, colour and scale.
Cubism and geometric abstraction (emphasizing basic line forms and flat colour planes) were part of Formalism.

Geography Connection(s):
Midwest United States

Time Line Connection:
1961

Resources:
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Picturing America website:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/

Connect to web links below by clicking on individual address or access through the NEH site for Additional Resources at:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/about.php?subPage=about_ad_res

http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/
Getty Museum Education department Web site, Teachers’ Programs and Resources, is designed for K-12 teachers who wish to introduce art and art history into their classrooms. The site uses works form the museum’s collection along with pages A Grade-by-Grade Guide, The Elements of Art (teaching the formal components of art such as line and color) and a PDF file Lesson Template.
Also included are pages for the National Standards in the Visual Arts. Lesson Plans for Grade 9-12 use the photography of Dorothea Lange.

Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) Bloomington, Indiana University
(812) 349-3050 – To Reserve Resource Materials

Midwest (United States)

*U.S. Geography for Children: The Midwest DVD Video Series*
Call Number: J917.7Mid (Children’s Collection)
Includes: Teacher’s Guide and On-line Map Activities

*Discovery Channel: U.S. Geography: The Midwest DVD Video Series*
Call Number: J917.77 Uni (Children’s Collection)
Includes: Curriculum Units and Teaching Resources

Photography

Call Number: J621.367 (Children’s Collection)
Includes: Teacher’s Guide, glossary, questions and activities

*Picture This: Fun Photography and Crafts* by Debra Friedman
Call Number: J770Fr (Children’s Collection)
Includes: Discovering how lighting, angles and composition let children discover how to see the world in new ways.

Web sites:

To access the Sinsabaugh American Landscape Educator’s Unit on the Indiana University Art Museum web site:
  Go to:
  [http://www.iub.edu/~iuam/iuam_home.php](http://www.iub.edu/~iuam/iuam_home.php)
  Click on “Collections”
  Click on “Online Collections”
  Click on “American Horizons: The Photographs of Art Sinsabaugh
    When page opens, click on Exhibitions
    On this page click on “Educator’s Supplement (pdf)

BrainPOP
  [http://www.brainpop.com/about/](http://www.brainpop.com/about/)
  Includes interactive unit on Photography, movie and related information on how photography has shaped the way we see the world – past and present.

**Indiana Academic Standards – Visual Arts Grade/Level 5**
**RESPONDING TO ART: History**
Standard 1

*Students understand the significance of visual art in relation to historical, social, political, spiritual, environmental, technological, and economic issues.*

5.1.1 Identify the relationship between a work of art and the geography and characteristics of
the culture, and identify where, when, why, and by whom the work was made (Focus: North America).

Standard 2

Students recognize significant works of Western and non-Western art and understand the chronological development of art movements.

5.2.1 Identify and be familiar with a range of selected works of art identifying artists, culture, style, and period.

5.2.2 Identify distinguishing characteristics of style in individual artists work and art movements.

RESPONDING TO ART: Criticism

Standard 3

Students describe, analyze, and interpret works of art and artifacts.

5.3.1 Analyze the artist’s use of sensory, formal, technical, and expressive properties in a work of art.

5.3.2 Construct meaning in the work based on personal response, properties found in the work, and background information on the context of the work.

Standard 4

Students identify and apply criteria to make informed judgments about art.

5.4.1 Listen to multiple critiques of works of art by peers, teachers, people from the art world and identify criteria used.

5.4.2 Apply criteria based on properties found in the work and research from the historical context of the work to make informed judgments.

RESPONDING TO ART: Aesthetics

Standard 5

Students reflect on and discuss art theories and aesthetic issues concerning the meaning and significance of art.

5.5.1 Identify problems or puzzles in a work of art or aesthetic issue, construct a hypothesis, and evaluate alternate hypotheses.

5.5.2 Identify and analyze a variety of well reasoned points of view on aesthetic issues (censorship, plagiarism) and develop a personal point of view.

Standard 6

Students theorize about art and make informed judgments.

5.6.1 Identify artwork made from the artist’s philosophy that art is at its best when it moves people to act for the betterment of society (instrumentalism).

5.6.2 Understand that personal preference is one of many criteria used in making judgments about art.

CAREERS AND COMMUNITY

Standard 11

Students recognize a variety of art-related professions and careers in our society.

5.11.1 Identify the roles of artists and critics in the community.

5.11.2 Identify various responsibilities of selected careers in art (illustrator, costume and set designer, sculptor, display designer, painter, graphic designer, animator, visual editor).

INTEGRATED STUDIES

Standard 13

Students identify and make connections between knowledge and skill in art and all other subject areas such as humanities, sciences, and technology.

5.13.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different disciplines.


**Standard 14**

_Students understand the connections between many art forms including dance, theater, music, visual arts, and media arts._

5.14.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different art forms.

**National Academic Standards – Visual Arts – Level 5**

**Content Standard #4:** Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

_Achievement Standard:_

Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts

Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

**Content Standard #5:** Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

_Achievement Standard:_

Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art

Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures

**Content Standard #6:** Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

_Achievement Standard:_

Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context

Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts