

PHOTOGRAPHIC

VISION

Artists have always pondered the nature of vision, but the camera introduced a new dimension to this exploration—initiating new ways of seeing and presenting subject matter for photographers and painters alike. Inspired by the special exhibition “Jeff Wall,” on view June 29–September 23, this tour directs your eye to the photographic vision.



REGENSTEIN HALL

The Flooded Grave (1998–2000) by Jeff Wall

Though Jeff Wall’s image of a freshly dug grave filled with marine life presents obviously incongruous elements, it still has the feel of a documentary photograph. However, this is the magic of Wall’s work—staging complexly contrived scenes as images of real life. For this work, he raised aquatic creatures in his studio, photographed them, and digitally fused their image with those of two different Vancouver cemeteries. What appears as a snapshot of a strange but transitory moment actually took two years to create!



GALLERY 263

The Artist Looks at Nature (1943) by Charles Sheeler

With his easel perched on the edge of an abrupt precipice in front of a bizarre landscape, the artist curiously ignores his surroundings, concentrating instead on portraying an interior scene. The drawing he is creating is derived from an actual photograph that Sheeler took, which became the basis for later works in a variety of media. The camera offered Sheeler a seemingly objective view of the interior, while the surreal, even irrational landscape appears entirely imaginative. Sheeler then paradoxically titled the painting *The Artist Looks at Nature*, prompting his audience to consider the subjectivity inherent to the artistic process.



GALLERY 141

24-3-86 (1986) by Gerhard Richter

Would you ever guess that the “canvas” of this work, underneath splashes and scrapes of brightly-colored paint, is, not a canvas at all, but rather a photograph? And not just any photograph, but an enlarged black-and-white photograph of one of the artist’s own paintings. Throughout his career Richter explored the interconnection of different media, especially photography and painting. In the 1960s, his paintings derived from mundane holiday snapshots and newspaper photographs. This later work shows Richter literally integrating the photograph into his work.



GALLERY 201

Paris Street: Rainy Day (1877) by Gustave Caillebotte

With its panoramic sweep, meticulous rigorous perspective, and cropped figures, Caillebotte’s *Paris Street: Rainy Day* suggests the artist was affected by the prevailing presence of photography in the late 19th century. In fact, his brother Martial, a photographer, may have taught him some tricks of the trade. This centerpiece of the Art Institute’s collection also anticipates photography’s role in chronicling physical, social, and political change. In capturing the new urban landscape of Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann’s redesigned Paris, Caillebotte documents the city in an appropriately modern fashion.



GALLERY 4

Factory Butte, Utah (1975) by William Clift

The more one studies this breathtaking image of the American Southwest’s stunning natural landscape, the more it reveals the acute powers of the camera lens to capture nature’s painterly beauty as well as its precise details. The cottony clouds dissolve into the darkening sky as if expertly blended on a canvas while the minute gradations of the rocks suggest an accuracy only photography could capture. Clift, however, did not intend his photographs to merely document the awe-inspiring beauty of nature. Rather he sought to capture something more personally touching. As he put it, “Such places correspond to emotional currents within me.”



DON'T MISS

Now that you’ve looked at the collection through a new photographic lens, come see how three emerging artists articulate their own photographic vision in *On the Scene*: Kota Ezawa, Sarah Hobbs, Angela Strassheim in Gallery 1.