

Responding to Photography

Educator's Guide



AD | AGENCY

November 9, 2007 – January 27, 2008

prc

PHOTOGRAPHIC RESOURCE CENTER at boston university

“Responding to Photography” is an interactive guide designed to enhance your educational experience with exhibitions at the Photographic Resource Center. Educators are encouraged to use the information presented in the guide to prepare for their visit to the PRC.



The camera icon indicates an interactive prompt or activity that will guide you through the material and provide opportunities for discussion in your classroom.

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Introduction

About the PRC

The Photographic Resource Center (PRC) at Boston University is an independent non-profit organization that serves as a vital forum for the exploration and interpretation of new work, ideas, and methods in photography and related media. The PRC presents exhibitions, fosters education, develops resources, and facilitates community interaction for local, regional, and national audiences.



About AD | AGENCY

Photographic images surround us at all times, whether we notice them or not. Many of these images are related to advertising or marketing—designed to encourage us to purchase a particular product or service, or think a particular way about something. The next time you read a magazine, are walking down the street, or are in a store, take a look around at just how many images are suggesting you buy something, dress, look, or act a certain way.



Artists in the PRC exhibition **AD | AGENCY**, ask us to think about the nature of these images as well as our, and their, own habits as consumers. The art on view presents, alters, and reflects on consumer-based imagery—from materials such as advertising and product photography, to catalogues, print ads, products, or stores themselves. **AD | AGENCY** provides an opportunity to investigate the life behind and power of the objects, signs, and symbols that are marketed to us and how they, and we, fit into the cycle of consumption.

Curriculum Connections

School tours at the PRC are designed to support Citywide Learning Standards and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks using material presented in current exhibitions. The content presented in this guide is designed to help you prepare for your visit and is most suitable for students in grades 9-12 but may be adjusted to meet your needs.

Examples of Visual Art Content Standards connections for Grades 9-12

Content Standard	Proficient Achievement Standards	Advanced Achievement Standards
4. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures	a. Students will analyze and interpret art works in relation to form, context, and purposes.	
5. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of students' own work and the work of others.	a. Students will identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works.	a. Students will correlate responses to works of visual art with various techniques for communicating meanings, ideas, attitudes, views, and intentions.
	b. Students will describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created.	b. Students will describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created.
	c. Students will reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.	c. Students will reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.
6. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines	b. Students will analyze the function of art in their lives and in society.	

Image Credit: Diana Shearwood, *Vitamin Water, Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California*, 2006, from the series "Behind the Mall," image on perforated vinyl, installed in the PRC's storefront windows. Courtesy of the artist

Issues to Explore



As you explore the artwork in **AD | AGENCY**, think about the following:

SUBJECT MATTER What is going on in the image and how can you tell?

ARTISTIC INTENT Why do you think the artist created the image? What is the point of the picture?

PATTERNS/TRENDS Do you see common issues, ideas, or techniques in different works of art? If so, what are they?

PROCESS Many artists follow a specific process that determines the subjects they select and how they'll create an image. They'll often repeat this process to create an ongoing project. What processes do you notice these artists following? Why do you think they use them?

FORM How does the artist's use of formal elements and composition strengthen the image?

TECHNIQUE How did the artist create the image and why do you think s/he chose to create it that way? For example: How big is the actual image? Does the surface appear glossy or matte? How do these choices, made by the artist, affect the finished work?

Consider This...



As you examine the images in **AD | AGENCY** think about the artists' relationships with their subject matter—consumer culture. Are they objective observers? Are they participants? Are they a little of both?

Consider this quote from **AD | AGENCY** artist Kate Bingaman-Burt describing her project: "Obsessive Consumption is repulsed and grossly fascinated by the branding of consumer culture...It wants to eat the entire bag of candy and enjoy the sickness that it feels an hour later."

Art and Artists

diana shearwood

Diana Shearwood, *Steak, Santa Fe Springs, California*, 2006, from the series "Behind the Mall," image on perforated vinyl, installed in the PRC's storefront windows. Courtesy of the artist



Canadian artist Diana Shearwood takes photographs of vehicles that feature wrap advertising—a marketing practice where product images are wrapped around cars, trucks, or trains, creating moving billboards. Often the wrapped trucks transport food items and these products can travel thousands of “food miles” from its origin to your plate. For this exhibition the artist wrapped the PRC’s windows with these images.



By removing these product images from their original locations and re-placing them in an art exhibition the artists is trying to change how we interpret the image. Write 4 terms you would use to describe the steak pictured above:



Installation view of Diana Shearwood's photographs at the PRC.

The next time you eat a meal try and determine where your food came from. Was it produced locally or was it shipped to you on a wrapped truck? What difference does it make?

jonathan lewis

For his series “WalmArt” British artist Jonathan Lewis photographed the inside of different “big box” or large chain stores. He then altered or changed the photograph in Photoshop, a computer based program, by pixelating it. The resulting image presents a complex arrangement of colors and patterns that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Jonathan Lewis, *Lidl*, from the series “WalmArt,” 2006, Pigmented inkjet on smooth watercolor paper, 23 x 28 inches, Courtesy of Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York, NY



Stores carefully plan where they place products on the shelves and how they use color to create a mood for the shopper.

How would you describe the different color palette in these two images? How do you think the difference in colors might influence the mood in the store, and by extension, you?



Jonathan Lewis, *Marks and Spencer*, from the series “WalmArt,” 2006, Pigmented inkjet on smooth watercolor paper, 23 x 28 inches, Courtesy of Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York, NY

brian ulrich

For his series "Copia," meaning a plentiful supply, Brian Ulrich takes pictures in retail and thrift stores, while also photographing the people in those stores. His images present the wide variety of shopping experiences available to the American consumer. Ulrich's photographs also suggest that stores often target specific people based on their interests, preferences, and economic background.



Brian Ulrich, *Gurnee, IL*, 2005 (1999), from the series "Copia," *C-print*, 40 x 50 inches, Courtesy of artist and Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY



Look at the image above. List 6 different products you see available for sale. Think about what these products are used for and what interests a person who shops here might have.

dean kessmann



By arranging a plastic bag on the surface of a scanner, photographer Dean Kessmann is able to transform an ordinary object into something new and unique. This photograph is part of a series titled "Plastic on Paper" for which the artist is recycling mass-produced objects (shopping bags that will long outlast the photograph or photographer) into works of art.



The logos placed on plastic bags like this are designed to be easily recognizable and are often associated with particular stores. Can you identify the logo on this bag?

Create your own work of art from mass-produced or everyday objects. Look around your school or home for objects to use while thinking about what you want to express through your work. You may want to create a sculpture from or photograph these objects. Think about how these items were originally used, how many of these items are made, and what happens to them when they are thrown away.

Dean Kessmann, *Have a Nice Day*, from the series "Plastic on Paper," 2005, Digital pigment print, 34 x 24 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Conner Contemporary Art, Washington, DC

penelope umbrico

Penelope Umbrico, *Instances of Books as Pedestals* (Some Extreme), #6, from the series "Private Residence (From Home Improvement Catalogs)," 2007. Archival digital prints, Courtesy of the artist and Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA



Penelope Umbrico scans or re-photographs small details from home improvement store catalogues from companies like Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware. She most often focuses on the reflections in mirrors, as seen below, or stacks of books, as seen to the left. She then creates large prints of these images removing them from their original placement and function as advertisements.



Use the details presented in Umbrico's images to create a personality for the imaginary person who could live in these pictures. Consider the following:

What types of objects are present?

What type of room or furniture do they have?

What were they doing before they left?

Where did they go?



Penelope Umbrico, *Mirrors (from Catalogs)*, 2002, #11, C-print face-mounted to laser cut plexi, Courtesy of the artist and Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA

Michael Mittelman



Michael Mittelman, *SkyMall: Figurative*, 2006, Sculpture purchased from SkyMall catalog printed by Canvas On Demand using Gallery Wrap and Light BrushStrokes, 24 x 20 inches, Courtesy of the artist



Some artists claim that the simple act of selecting an object and labeling it as art makes it so. Do you think that an artist has to create a work of art or is the act of selecting a pre-existing object enough for it to be considered art?

matt siber



Matt Siber, *Untitled*, #13, from the series "The Untitled Project," 2003, Archival inkjet prints, each 45 x 55 inches, Courtesy of the artist

As part of his "Untitled" series, Matt Siber creates a photograph and then removes all written text from the image. He places the text on an adjoining blank panel where it would have appeared in the photograph. The diptych (two images presented together) demonstrates just how much we're surrounded by both visual and written advertising messages.



By removing the text the viewer is also more able to focus on the composition found in this photograph of a street scene. In the space provided describe how Siber uses the following elements to create a strong composition of this urban landscape.

Light:

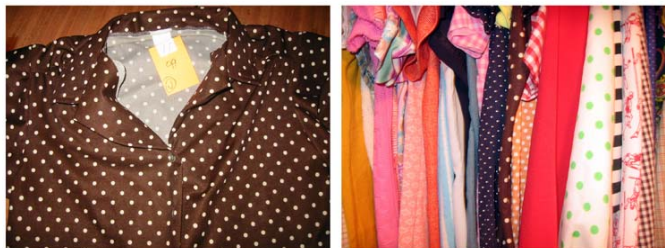
Shape:

Texture:

Line:

Kate Bingaman-Burt

For several years Kate Bingaman-Burt has been photographing each item she buys. She later photographs those same objects in use, in her home. The photograph on the left is off a newly purchased shirt. The same shirt is hidden in the photograph on the right, sandwiched between the artist's other clothing. The result of this process is an obsessive documentation, or record, of the artist's consumerism, which, in turn fuels her art making.



Kate Bingaman-Burt, *Detail, Obsessive Consumption is Five*, 2002-2007, Digital prints face mounted to plexi, each 5 x 7 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Jen Bekman, New York, NY



Recall Bingaman-Burt's quote when describing her work and consumer culture: "It wants to eat the entire bag of candy and enjoy the sickness that it feels an hour later." What do you think the sickness is that she is referring to?

Hank Willis Thomas

Hank Willis Thomas, *Smokin' Joe- "You Think You Can Get Me to Eat My Flapjacks without my Blue Bomme? Try It"*, 2006/1979, from the series "Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America 1968-2008," Lambda photograph (Digital C-print), 28 x 35 inches, Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, NY



For his series "Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America," Hank Willis Thomas alters magazine advertisements that, as stated by the artist, "are marketed towards an African American audience or feature Black subjects." The artist removes all indication of what is being sold by taking out the text as well as logos, as a result he is "un-branding" the ad. A brand is a particular look, identity, lifestyle, or way of thinking that is associated with a product.

The artist suggests that advertisements sometimes rely on generalizations about groups of people in order to develop a "brand." For example, the people in the image to the right, all of whom are African American, are dressed in a certain fashion. The advertisers likely want the viewer to believe that if you want to be like the people in the ad, then you should buy the types of clothes that they are wearing.



Hank Willis Thomas, *The Oft Forgotten Black Flower Children of Harlem, 2006/1969*, from the series "Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America 1968-2008," Digital C-print, 35 1/4 x 28 1/2 inches, Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, NY



Unbranding Activity: Select an advertisement from a magazine or newspaper that you read. The advertisement should feature a person or a group of people. Answer the following questions:

How old is the person in the advertisement?

Are they male or female?

What is their cultural background?

What type of clothes are they wearing?

Are they wealthy?

What is their personality like—hip/cool/fun/intelligent?

Can you relate to this person and advertisement?

Advertisers think about all of these questions when developing a brand and who they plan on marketing this product to. So if you answered yes to the last question then, chances are, they were thinking of you when developing this brand.

Define Your Own Brand

The work in **AD | AGENCY** helps us reflect on the consumer culture we live in. Children and teenagers have become increasingly marketed to by advertisements in this culture. Be mindful for the brands and advertisements that are designed for you as you watch television or movies, browse the internet, or read magazines and papers. Think about your own brand, or what makes you, you.

For more information on **AD | AGENCY** including an essay, images, and websites, please visit www.prcboston.org/adagency.htm. For more information on school tours and education programs please call 617.975.0600.