



Dartmouth's
Art &
Art History
Magazine

*“A lot of good things don’t get made
because of too much thinking.”
- Agnes Martin*

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We welcome the submission of any article, essay, or artwork for publication in Ephemera. We encourage critical discussions that challenge traditional art historical narratives while embracing diverse voices. By keeping the Dartmouth community engaged with contemporary and historical art discourse, we seek to inspire curiosity, creativity, and intellectual growth for students, faculty, and alumni alike. We will consider all submissions from any member of the Dartmouth Undergraduate community, but reserve the right to publish only those that align with our mission.

Getting Involved

Ephemera exists to create an engaging and dynamic platform for the exploration of art history within the Dartmouth community. We at Ephemera invite people from all academic disciplines to join us in our discussions. If you would like to get involved, please feel free to email us or visit our website.

Letters To The Editor

We deeply value your opinions and encourage thoughtful words of support, dissent, or other views. We will gladly consider any letter that is consistent with our mission statement's message on promoting intellectual discourse in Dartmouth's community.

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Letter from the Editors

As our dedication reads and the wise Agnes Martin once said, “A lot of good things don’t get made because of too much thinking.” Throughout this process, suffice it to say we did a good deal of thinking. We considered deeply what it would mean to carry this magazine into its sophomore season. How could we solidify its place on campus? What did we want to keep? Where could we experiment? What was the heart of Ephemera? Over the year, we spent countless hours looking over submissions, editing works, and debating over what fonts and colors would pair best. Despite all our thinking, our aim with this issue was to have a little fun and try something new.

After 9 months of experiments and just one more proof, we landed upon the issue before you. The magazine is quite different from our freshman issue, and yet, we still think, and hope you do too, that we capture what makes art at Dartmouth so special. With all of that thinking done, we hope you enjoy our “good thing.”



Lucie

&



Sara

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Emeline Moss, *Canvas*, 2026. Oil on Canvas. 24 × 24 in.

Reflections on Wolfgang Tillmans' at Centre Pompidou



By Sadie Straus

Rien ne nous y préparait - Tout nous y préparait

Rien ne nous y préparait - Tout nous y préparait, translated as *Nothing Could Have Prepared Us - Everything Could Have Prepared Us* flanked the entrance of the Centre Pompidou library, from June to September. It is the concluding exhibit before Le Centre Pompidou, one of Paris' premiere contemporary art museums, closes for a five year revamp. The enigmatic phrase covers over 30 years of German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans' work, famous for photographing Frank Ocean's *Blonde* album cover. But the exhibition teases at a larger why. Why is this our present? Why do we know what we know? Why do we act how we act?

Emotive, witty, and wise — Tillmans' show responds. Mirroring its library setting, Tillmans offers a bank of undogmatic, almost panoptic, knowledge. His photographs are innocent then vulgar, euphoric then melancholic, beautiful then repulsive, zoomed-out almost to drone view then zoomed-in, becoming just pixels. Their range and incongruence mimic human memory. Just as peoples' memories form their selfhood, these images are seeds of a generation's sense of self. So, from a blur of photographs, an answer emerges: uncertainty, coincidence, emotion.

Tillmans' photographs resonated with me as a distinctly accurate

depiction of human experience today. Tillmans addresses the most pressing issues of our generation from the inside out. Instead of making assertions, Tillmans offers glimpses of the experiences that define dialogue about power, gender, internet, sexuality, nature, community, and poverty. Tillmans' work is palpably rooted in his perspective but transcends limits of nationality, age, and class, becoming a broader meditation on being human today.

Perhaps the ethos that generated his exhibit's fullness lies in the title



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Lüneburg (self)*, 2020.

of his 2003 Tate Modern solo show: *If one thing matters, everything matters*. Tillmans' Pompidou exhibition is the product of letting things matter, of de-hierarchizing experiences, and of celebrating everything. Fruits, colors,

kisses, cities, keys – the images vary in size, placement, and installation. Their value is secondary, their existence comes first.





Elah Wilson, *Shhhh from All the Ages I Am*, 2025. Silver Gelatin Print. 8×10 in.

A New Look

By Aspen Toussaint

As Paris recovered from the aftermath of WWII and the German occupation, its citizens longed to return to “normal.”

During the war, the top designers redirected their efforts to utility wear. Greys and blacks dominated the shelves as dye rations restricted access to color. The elitist and extravagant Hollywood glamour of the thirties died more each day alongside the soldiers fighting in the war. With the men away fighting, women were pulled out of the home and into the workforce. Across the world, women experienced newfound freedom not only in what

they could do, but what they could wear. Factory work called for shorter hemlines, less restrictive silhouettes, and on occasion—PANTS! With Paris occupied by the Germans, their dominance in the fashion industry went from absolute to nonexistent. In turn, American designers no longer could lean on Paris for inspiration. Their newfound (albeit forced) creativity and utilitarian demands of the workplace led to designs that formed the foundation for our casual, sporty “American” look.

When the allies liberated Paris in 1944, their designers immediately



Little Below the Knee Club Picket Dior, 1947.

got to work in the atelier. In fall of 1944, they showcased their first collections. Three years later—on February 12th, 1947—a new and upcoming designer—Christian Dior—launched his revolutionary collection. Although dubbed “The New Look” by Harper’s Bazar, there was actually nothing “new” about his collection. His collection brought back the corsets, nipped-in waists, and long, voluminous skirts of the early 1900s. The clothes reflected people’s desire for normalcy in an incredibly chaotic era. Just as women were kicked out of the workforce (which many of them had come to enjoy) and put back into the home, they were placed back into restrictive corsets and long hemlines—a stark contrast to the freedom of pants and utility suits women wore during the war. In fact, American protesters crashed his shows with signs reading “Mr. Dior, we abhor dresses to the floor.”

Additionally, his large use of material was highly controversial following post-war rationing. Despite the controversy, The New Look is arguably the most influential fashion collection ever released. In fact, the New Look has inspired a number of television productions from Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris to Apple TV’s recent dramatised biographical drama, “The New Look,” which explores the moment in history.

Wearers of Haute Couture rejoiced at being back in their overtly feminine garb after years of boxy and bland war clothing. Due to Dior, French couturiers, and the desire for luxury, were back on top. People sought to completely divorce themselves from the war, including a rejection of the drabbier, rationed fashion of the past years. As time went on, his critics grew quiet and the nipped in waist



Willy Maywald, The New Look—Bar Suit.

and full skirt style dominated both day and evening wear into the mid 50s. When one thinks about 50s fashion, they think of poodle skirts and fitted bodices—Dior’s collection was the foundation of this style.

So, did Dior really revolutionize fashion as we know it? No. The pieces were more nostalgic than novel, Dior recognized what people and the fashion industry needed; they wanted to feel as they used to before the world became so muddled by decades of war and economic depression. His collection inspired optimism—a belief that a New Normal could be acquired through this “New Look.” Dior understood how to take advantage of society’s needs and give them something that would fulfill their desire for normalcy. In the process, he saved the dying art of Haute Couture. Without him, we arguably would not still be seeing the extravagance of runway shows or fashion as an art form in general today.



Sabine Spier, *Cross Section of Forever*, 2026. Oil on canvas. 46 × 78 in.



Sabine Spier, *Ten*, 2026. Oil on canvas. 46 × 78 in.



*Life Has Changed,
Hasn't It?*

By Elise Little and Lucie Morton

A Photography Tour of the DOC House with Julie and John Mathias '69

This past year, Ephemera was privileged to receive the Student Organization Grant from the Class of 1969 to fund our publication needs. Over Homecoming, the class invited us to a celebratory dinner, hosted at the DOC House. Originally a gift from the Class of 1900 to the college in 1929, The DOC House was recently revamped by the Class of 1969 in 2021. While we mingled at dinner, we could not help but notice the black and white photographs which decorated the walls. Not just any old photographs, the collection is a love letter to the history of the DOC at Dartmouth, compiled of little-known images from the Dartmouth archives.

This winter, Ephemera went back to the house and sat down with Julie Mathias, the lead designer for the photography project, and her husband John Mathias Class of 1969 to discuss the process of revitalizing the house and the photography collection on its walls.

While the Class had fond memories of the house, it had fallen into relative disrepair over the years. In the words of Julie Mathias, “[i]t was a building under threat.” Plants had overgrown the building, the limestone was cracked, and haphazard plywood repairs dotted the property, not to mention—as John Mathias added—“the electrical was ridiculous.”

In honor of their 50 year reunion, the Class of 1969 set about a mission—to restore the house to its former glory. The road was not always easy, whether it be fundraising, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the tough realities of renovating a nearly 100 year old building. Yet, for “the class with class,” the reward was sweet

and they hope to see students, and the rest of the Hanover community, continue to enjoy it for another 100 years.

John Mathias would especially like to see current students take the initiative to not only use the house —“better use it,” he remarked— but also take advantage of the unique outdoor opportunities that a school like Dartmouth affords them. Just in the spirit of the Dartmouth students lining the walls at the house, he would like to see more students get outside and experience the gateway to the great white north lest the old traditions die. John Mathias especially has fond memories of a particular weekend as a freshman up in the College Grant. Mathias was part of a group invited as part of a grant to spend the weekend enjoying the Grant with then President John Sloan Dickey and “he’d regale you and he did.” Yet, of all the “regaling” from the great outdoorsman Dickey, Mathias most remembers a post-dinner clean up conversation. “[Dickey] said that he really liked washing dishes because it’s the one job where you knew that there was a start and you knew there was a finish and you could get it done.... And I was thinking to myself, this is a man who obviously hasn’t done a lot of dishes in his life.”

Julie Mathias, a fine artist and former interior architect, was heavily involved in the redesign process. However, one of her favorite parts of revamping the house was not the architecture, but the photography collection that she discovered while cleaning out the house. After dusting off those in the house, Julie Mathias turned to the Dartmouth archives to supplement the collection—a process which Mathias particularly enjoyed.



John Sloan Dickey at the DOC House. Date Unknown. Courtesy of Julie Mathias.

“Once you get involved in a little project like that at Rauner, everything comes alive because there’s so much to see.... I think I spent a week in the library.” Once she decided on the photos, she sent them off to Chicago to be restored and reprinted on archival cotton paper and then framed locally in the Upper Valley.

Certain photos grabbed her eye for their content. A pair of photos — one featuring Dick Brooks’ ‘39 building the prototype for his ice sculpture of Eleazar Wheelock and the second of the completed sculpture (36 feet without the base and an estimated 40 tons!)—capture the creativity and buy-in to the winter-carnival sculpture-making contest. The grand sculptures are no longer a staple of winter carnival, but it’s a Dartmouth tradition the Mathias’ hoped not to see lost to time. Despite the lessening snow in the winter, John Mathias urged us to do it in spite. “There’s always somebody who’s going to say there’s not enough [snow].

We can’t do it..”

Other photos stood out to her for their composition, and then later the interesting stories that had to follow. A photo in the back room shows a row of Dartmouth ski patrollers crossing a snow-white mountaintop in perfect formation. The image feels posed with the simple shapes and colors giving it an abstract edge. Mathias remarked it reminded her of Stanley Kubrick’s movies. “It looks like *Clockwork Orange*.”

Yet, more than the minimalist aesthetic that drew her to the photo, Mathias was captured by the story of these patrollers. In need of troops equipped to fight in the mountainous alps during World War II, the US army turned to Dartmouth, and its skiers, for recruits. 119 Dartmouth men—students, alumni, and employees—would enlist as members of 10th Mountain Division, heading to alps to fight against the axis powers. Here the camouflaged patrollers

ski back from a day of drills.

Others had no explanation, but that was what drew in Julie Mathias. “That’s the fun thing about photography. You can guess and imagine what you think it is.”

Throughout the process, it is the spirit of innovation and curiosity at Dartmouth that stood out to Julie Mathias. “It’s human ingenuity,” said Mathias, remarking on the creative, and at times, fantastical inventions of Dartmouth student’s past.

The Dartmouth Mathias sought to immortalize in these photographs is very different from the one we as students see today, and yet, that is the joy behind the collection. Walking around the room is like a game of “Where’s Waldo?”—figuring out where a photo may have been taken in reference to today’s campus.

Overall, The Class of 1969 sought through their renovation to enliven a history of a Dartmouth past. As Mathias stated, “Life has changed, hasn’t it?”



Artist Dick Brook '39 and his snow sculpture of Eleazar Wheelock on the Green, 1939.



Freshmen Trips to 1940s, 1940s. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Skating, 1954. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Outing Club, Club House, Date Unknown. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Outing Club Trips, circa 1915. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Ralph W. Brown, *Ski Patrol*, 1940–1949. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Dartmouth Aegis, *Ski jumping 2*, Date Unknown. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Adrian Bouchard, *Mount Moosilauke Summit Camp*, Date Unknown. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Date Night on Occum Pond, Date Unknown. Courtesy of Julie Mathias.



Occum Pond, Late 1920's-early 1930's. Digital by Dartmouth Library.



Ryan Williams, *Tangata Whenuatanga: Te Nohoaka o Tukiaauau, a self*, Oil on Unstretched Canvas.

Memoir



By Auggie Laster

There is a kind of silence in Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World* (1948) that does not settle, but stirs. A woman lies in an open field, her torso twisted, with one arm strained behind to propel her up as the other reaches out. The grass around her is dry, ochre, and sun-bleached. The farmhouse in the distance is modest—gray, weathered, unremarkable—but the space between it and the woman feels immense.

Wyeth painted this scene with egg tempera, an inflexible medium that requires precision and resists revision. Each blade of grass is etched with delicate care, but the overall effect is not warmth or abundance; it is fragility. Stillness pervades the scene, but it is a brittle stillness. When I first encountered the painting, I did not immediately think of disability or isolation. I thought of inheritance. Of land. Of the persistent ache that comes from inhabiting a place that one cannot fully call home. I thought of the hills and canyons I grew up knowing as “ours,” and of the strange discomfort that comes from loving a landscape while also knowing that love is built over histories I was taught only partially, if at all.

Christina Olson, Wyeth's subject, was partially paralyzed from a degenerative condition. Wyeth watched her crawl across the fields near her house in Cushing, Maine, and painted her not with pity, but with awe. Still, the image is not of triumph, nor of defeat. It is of in-betweenness—a gesture suspended, a journey stalled mid-effort. That visual interruption unsettled me. I am not paralyzed as Christina was, but I, too, feel bound to the ground in complicated ways—rooted, yet uneasy, held by history as much as by place.

My great-great-great-grandfather, Richard O'Neill, was an Irish immigrant

who came to California and—through grit, timing, and proximity to power—became a major landowner. The story, as I inherited it, is one of pride: the immigrant who “made it.” That story was told to me as a family achievement, almost as a creation myth: land as proof of perseverance, land as evidence that we belonged. But the older I became, the more that story began to feel incomplete. The same land that signified success in family memory also carried the silence of those who had lived, worked, and been displaced there before us. Yet this painting did not remind me of my family's land so much as provoke a reckoning with it.

Wyeth's image complicated that narrative. Christina is already on the land, yet the house—her home—is distant, inaccessible. Presence is not the same as possession. That paradox mirrors my own relationship to the land my family calls ours. We live there. Yet it remains, in some essential way, unreachable. For Christina, that distance is measured across a field; for me, it is measured across inheritance, memory, and historical guilt. Like Christina, I move across a landscape that I am deeply connected to, yet never fully at ease within—a land both held and haunted. The haunting does not come from not loving the land. It comes from loving it while knowing that my family's claim to it is not the beginning of its story.

Wyeth's artistic choices reinforce this dissonance. The space between Christina and the house—the barren grass, the faded sky, and the absence of any path—is drained of vitality. Inherited land can feel like that: not fertile ground, but curated memory. Something preserved more than lived. For me, the house on the hill is not a symbol of home but of myth. Its windows are closed. Its door is



Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, 1948. Tempera on panel, 32 1/4 × 47 3/4" (81.9 × 121.3 cm). New York, New York, MOMA, 16.1949.

hidden. There is no route—literal or emotional—that leads to it clearly. It stands, like the story of my family's success, intact but unentered, prominent but inaccessible. The ranch my family owns, carved from territory once stewarded by the Acjachemen and Luiseño peoples, became a monument to one man's success. But that success was scaffolded by systems of displacement—Indigenous, then Mexican, then laboring. That truth lingers, like Christina's reach: unresolved, just out of frame.

Wyeth places the viewer at Christina's level. We do not hover above her; we stand with her, feeling the dry earth beneath us. That proximity collapses romantic distance and demands something harder: not just empathy, but identification. Yet the identification I feel is partial and uneasy. It comes not from sharing Christina's physical condition, but from recognizing the ache of being bound to a place that remains, in some essential way, withheld. I can no

longer look at my family's hills and canyons without feeling the weight of what they conceal. I was raised among oaks and open space, among family stories and generational pride, but also among silence. Silence about what came before us. Silence about who was displaced so that we could stay. *Christina's World* teaches me to read that distance not only spatially, but also psychologically and historically. It reminds me that arrival is not the end of migration, and inheritance is not the same as understanding.

I do not wish to disown the land my family calls home. Yet I cannot accept it without inquiry. To belong there—to belong honestly—requires excavation. Like Christina, I must drag myself across uneven ground, story by story. *Christina's World* offers no resolution; it is all reach, no arrival. Yet that too suggests a form of belonging—not possession, but attentiveness. Not to dwell inside the house, but to remain near it. Close enough to remember, never quite close enough to rest.



Javier Baluyut. *The Artist's Sketchbook*, 2026. Ballpoint Pen.



10 Weeks Abroad



in Rome

From the Diary of Erika Huston

10 weeks in Rome is hard to put into words—but here, I will try.

There is nothing quite like starting class in front of St. Peter's Basilica or the Colosseum. Every morning I woke up, made a quick breakfast, and began a trek to the class location of the day. We walked all over Rome to see that day's sight first hand—rather than through lecture slides— and never meeting in the same place twice.

Some days had more in store, including a private tour of the Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel. The once-in-a-lifetime experience to be one of fifteen people standing in the Sistine Chapel or to hold the key that opens the chapel are some not even the Cardinals enjoy during the Conclave. A big thank you to the Art History department and the Guarini Institute for this experience.

Other days came with more difficulties. Whether it was the torrential downpour as we toured the Colosseum or the sites unexpectedly hidden by scaffolding, our class adapted everyday to the busy, everchanging atmosphere of Rome.

In calmer moments, our class convened at Professor Cohen and Professor Kangas' apartment for "salon," where we discussed art history at large over snacks. We coveted these slow moments of discussing footnotes as a practice or tackling AI, while the bustling sound of tourists visiting the Pantheon across the street filled the background.

In Ravenna, we marveled at the beautiful mosaics, including those at the Basilica of San Vitale. In Bologna, we were captivated by the Sanctuary of Santa Maria della Vita's terracotta sculptures of Il Compianto sul Cristo Morto by Niccolò dell'Arca. In Florence, we discovered the architecture of the renaissance in full swing and bustled around the Uffizi Galleries, amazed with the masterpieces in every room. To Rome, thank you for having me. To art history, thank you for making Rome more than just another city by allowing me to appreciate the true art historical palimpsest it is.



Art, Ends, and Imitation in Plato's Republic X



By Gideon Gruel

Via Socrates and Glaucon's dialogue in Book 10 of *Republic*, Plato presents art as imitative. What does it imitate? Turning to everyday objects for his exempla, Plato uses Socrates's dialogue to distinguish a Thing—that is, a thing's true idea or Form—from a particular thing, a physical instantiation of the thing's Form; Bed, the intelligible pattern that makes all particular beds beds, is thus distinguished from a bed. Art, he argues, would be derivative of a particular thing alone and thus “thrice removed” from the initial impetus of imitation: a thing's Form.¹

Art, therefore, instantiates something far from Truth, which depends on an object's Form, and Plato is worried about the uncritical consumption of art because of its power to lead us away from Truth. This misorientation or confusion—a product of deception or ignorance—arises from any unqualified presentation (or perhaps any presentation) of a picture depicting a flute as being a flute. Although the grammar of that sentence equates “a picture depicting a flute” with “a flute,” we can be sure that Plato isn't too concerned that anyone would take such a picture to signify the ideal Form of a flute, that is “the idea which ... is the essence” of the flute.² Rather, it seems that Plato is concerned with clarifying misapprehensions between second- and third-order imitations, the latter of which “are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers.”³ Ruinous because, insofar as we are epistemic agents, with tools to discern the significance of reality's many layers, we have a duty to discern rightly. And that initial error often entails further epistemic consequences.

The distinction, however, seems a bit banal. Why does it matter for

us to keep in mind that art imitates an imitation rather than the “real thing”? Plato's Socrates insists that (1) insofar as art presents thrice-derived perception, it is thrice deluded, “hav[ing] an inferior degree of truth,” and (2) what little it profits turns out to be directed at “an inferior part of the soul”, for all good qualities resist imitation, making it easier to dress up the coarse and the carnal to seem celestial.⁴ Plato's conception of the arts is wrapped into a cosmology that, far from inherently disdaining art, disdains art's capacity to disguise that which pleases our earthly passions with a guise that suggests a more excellent essence. Confusing the lower for the higher inoculates the otherwise virtuous person with a self-betraying urge to let the passions rule. For Plato, the well-ordered society has much to gain from resisting art's confusing, even deceptive, relationship to Truth and its seductive summons to seek pleasure or wealth or power to the detriment of justice and virtue.

Although Plato attempts to argue the moral malignance of art, his argument falls short on two counts: (1) art may not actually be imitative, at least not in a way that renders it triply derived and (2) policing the arts in a well-ordered society—e.g., allowing only contributions like “hymns to the gods and praises of famous men”—would ultimately produce citizens more susceptible to the vices that Plato frets art's confusing crisscross of reality and invention impels us towards. To draw out these implications, I turn to Plato's discussion of the difference between those who make bridles/bits and those who paint them.

Art might not be imitative in the way Plato argues. Cows, hills, buildings, people, and other

phenomena certainly appear both in our reality as particulars and in artists' productions. Beyond appearances, there can no doubt exist some connection between the scenes of daily life and those observed in art. But that connection need not constitute imitation. Plato's jump to identify that observed connection as imitative reveals inconsistencies in his respective conceptions of the maker and the painter. I take these in turn.

First, Plato asserts that those who make particular objects, e.g., bed-makers, have greater access to the form Bed than bed-painters. This greater access consists in the knowledge of one's craft: for a bed-maker the knowledge of bed-making. A bed-painter, on Plato's view, insofar as she has no knowledge of bed-making, accesses less of Bed than a bed-maker. How can a bed-maker have greater access to the reality of a bed than any other person? He doesn't. Indeed, it rather seems that the bed-painter and the bed-maker occupy a similar relationship to Truth: each relies on an admixture of sight, experience, and practice to produce something that—in the time before they took up their respective professions—had already been developed. Similarly, it may be useful to consider the inherent commentary and, perhaps, alteration that each instance of bed has on the understanding of capital-B Bed, i.e., the Form of Bed. The bed-painting is no less inert in that respect than a particular bed, and it is similarly laden with all the foibles and distinctive qualities that, as with a bed-maker, a bed-painter can add from his own understanding and perspective to shift what Bed means. It is hardly the case, for example, that what many of us have imagined as a bed during all

this bed-talk corresponds to what Plato had in mind. Nevertheless, I assert that my memory foam mattress comes closer to Bed than anything Plato slept on.

Second, on the question of use. Plato's hierarchy of maker, user, and imitator (Republic 10.601c–602b) takes as an example a bridle and evaluates the painted bridle according to its distance from the practical function of a particular bridle. The rider possesses knowledge of what the bridle is for; the bridle-maker takes instruction from that knowledge; and the bridle-painter, or so Plato argues, reproduces only a bridle's appearance, without knowing whether (or how) the bridle is useful. Plato's argument, however, assumes that the practical use of the bridle supplies the proper standard for judging the usefulness of a painted bridle. But a painted bridle is not a deficient bridle: it is a different kind of thing, the use of which is directed toward a different end. The painted bridle is not meant to guide a horse, nor is that end expected of a painting. The fact that a painter cannot produce a functional bridle therefore does not show that the painting fails as a painting. Plato's hierarchy becomes persuasive only if imitation is understood as an attempted substitute for the object represented, which is unlikely in cases like the bridle/painted bridle. To evaluate a painted bridle principally by the standards proper to an actual bridle is to mistake the function of the artwork it is supposed to judge.

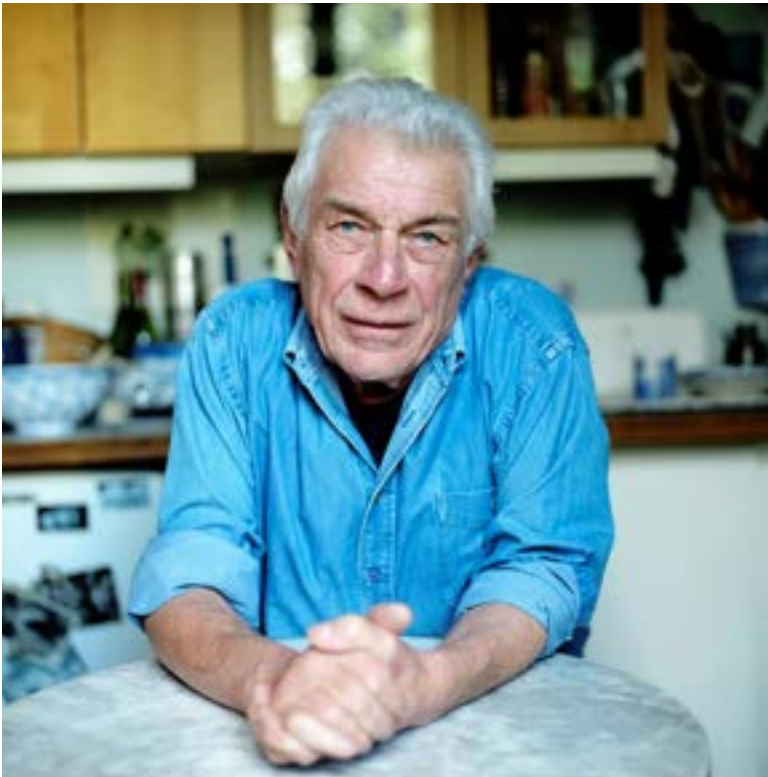
A final reflection on the role of art in society reveals that Plato's ban on imitative art may undermine the very moral formation it is intended to secure. By excluding most representations from the well-ordered city, Plato risks producing citizens

whose virtue depends on insulation rather than tested judgment. Imitative art, though potentially seductive, might also serve an educative function: exposing citizens to distorted desires within a regulated setting. This pedagogical approach would enable citizens to recognize and resist vice before confronting it in reality, rather than leaving them unprepared for its attractions. The Myth of Er at the end of Book X reinforces this analysis. The first soul to choose a new life selects the life of a tyrant, only later discovering with dismay that it entailed the devouring of his own children and other evils. This was a soul who “in a former life had dwelt in a well-ordered State.”⁶ Crucially, however, Plato specifies that this soul had participated in virtue habitually and not as a matter of philosophy: the orderliness of his former life had produced proper conduct without the judgment necessary to choose well for himself. Indeed, Plato observes that many of the souls ensnared by similarly disastrous choices came from heaven, untutored in suffering.⁷ The myth therefore suggests that insulation from vice does not guarantee an attendant understanding of vice’s evils; it may instead leave citizens especially vulnerable when vice first presents itself in an attractive form. The myth thus exposes a weakness in Platonic censorship: citizens untested against deceptive representations may acquire only a semblance of the capacity for discerning the true from the false, the good from the evil. If imitative art distorts truth, such distortion need not corrupt. It might instead provide a controlled encounter with appearances by which citizens can exercise the kind of judgment that habituation alone fails to secure.

1. Plato, and Benjamin Jowett. *The Republic*, 10.597e.
2. Plato, *The Republic*, 596e.
3. Plato, *The Republic*, 595b.
4. Plato, *The Republic*, 605a.
5. Plato, *The Republic*, 607a.
6. Plato, *The Republic*, 619c.
7. Plato, *The Republic*, 619c.

Photography as an Art

A Look into John Berger's
"Understanding a Photograph"



By Madeline Ehrlich

Art is an indefinite word, an idea that encompasses countless mediums and can extend beyond a picture. Specifically, the medium of photography has the ability to spark movements and shape ideas, transforming the world through documentation and acting as an outlet for creative expression. In John Berger's essay, *Understanding a Photograph*, he argues that photography should not be considered a fine art. However, a photo's ability to capture an artist's vision, share ideas, and arouse emotions counters Berger's solely technical evaluation of photography.

In stark comparison to photographs, Berger characterizes the medium of painting as "dying," citing that paintings have become "beyond the public" due to isolation in museums.¹ However, like paintings, photographs are inherently beyond the people, or inaccessible, due to their role in historical documentation. Photographs are mementos of a time period, capturing a moment that can never be repeated, only looked back upon from a future instance. While Berger connotes "beyond" as a negative term, something that isolates the public from an artwork, in reality, this idea of detachment from the art is due to the fact that art outlives the public. This can become a positive as it means the art can be continuously shared, regardless of the time in which it was created.

In this case, photos and paintings are comparable because they are both intended to outlast a current year and preserve the past. The presence of art in museums does not signal isolation as Berger argues. Rather, it symbolizes the public's acknowledgement of the importance of art in historical preservation and the need to protect

art from misplacement or ruination. The museum becomes a sanctuary where the viewer can step into this capsule and view history preserved within the frame. If evaluated from this position, both paintings and photography share the title of art, as they adhere to the similar goal of living on time as they are passed down through generations.

While Berger connotes "beyond" as a negative term, something that isolates the public from an artwork, in reality, this detachment from the art stems from the fact that art outlives the public. This can become a positive, as it means the art is continuously shared and able to transcend time. Ancient Roman sculptures and Renaissance paintings still exist because of the recognition from those in the past that art should be timeless and shared with future viewers. In this case, photos and paintings are the same because they are both meant to outlast the current year and preserve the past. The presence of art in museums does not signal isolation. Rather, it symbolises the public acknowledging the importance of art in historical preservation and the need to protect it from the many risks of misplacement or ruin. The museum becomes an enclave of security where the viewer can step into this capsule and view the history saved within the frame. In this view, both paintings and photography share the title of art, since they have a similar goal of living on in time by being passed down through generations.

Moreover, Berger's determination that art's value solely based on its economic value is narrow sighted. He claimed that "photographs have little or no property value because they have no rarity value."² However, while photographs can be reproduced,

the instances they imprison within their frame can never be recreated. Photographs are a portal into the past, or to borrow painting's phrase, a window onto a world. While it is easier to replicate photos than paintings, the uniqueness of photos stems from what they capture, not simply how many exist. In this case, photographs would have property value since their rarity stems from their precise recreation of history.

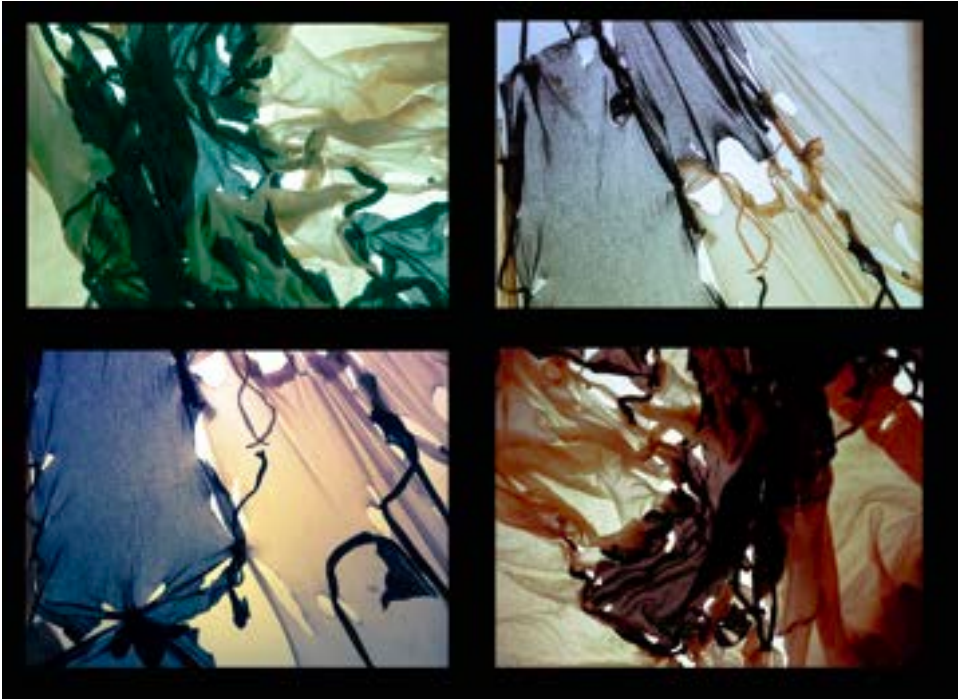
Berger claims that photographers look at what is absent as well as what is present. In this regard, I strongly agree. Photographers build their composition by recognizing what the photo includes, and the absences that will generate questions. This, like all art, causes photography to have an indefinite and subjective aspect. While photos hold truths, they also give way for human interpretation. The fact that individual photographers are the sole arbiters of what history to capture produces a form of oligarchy in which a select few are given the power to decide what should be remembered for the entire world.

As he continues his evaluation, Berger contradicts himself by saying that "one learns to read photographs as one learns to read footprints or cardiograms."³ Berger previously stated that the spectator must interpret the photo by realizing "what is present and what is absent."⁴ Unlike a set footprint, each person may understand the photo differently. Each diverse perspective offers individual insight that can not be narrowed down to a particular scientific formula. This idea is a fundamental aspect of art as a medium— art does not have a singular correct answer. Each person is unique, and their individual experiences and backgrounds help formulate how they read the art, allowing for compelling

evaluations that raise questions and guide interpretations that can be debated for centuries.

Photos are a key aspect to society. Since their development, they have been integral in broadening the scope of the world. In his conclusion, Berger characterizes photography as something that tests and challenges our view of reality, and therefore is not artwork. But I ask him, is that not the role of all art? Do paintings, drawings, and sculptures not draw the viewer in and compel them to question the world and what the image presents? As Berger stated, "we think of photographs as works of art, as evidence of particular truth...every photograph is in fact a means of testing" (Berger 3). But, the sole function of art is its ability to transcend truth and enter a world that depends on individual interpretation and imagination. Art can be rooted in truth, but it is also a product of human's desire to reach beyond the limits of reality and create a world of their own. Photographs enable this, both by capturing a history and depending on us to remember it.

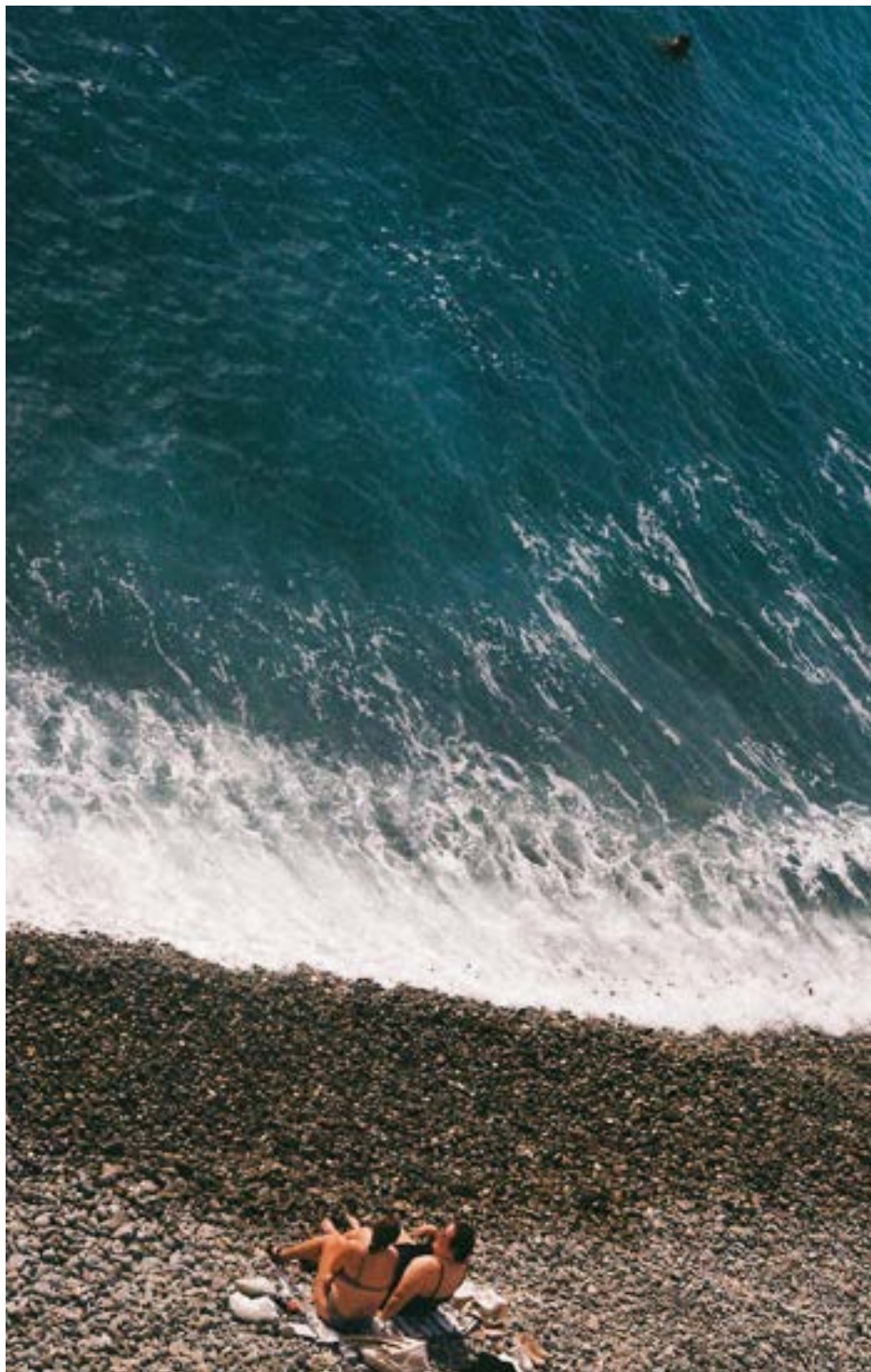
1. Berger, John. *Understanding A Photograph*, Selected Essays and Articles : The Look of Things. Penguin, 1972, 1.
2. Berger, *Understanding A Photograph*, 1.
3. Berger, *Understanding A Photograph*, 3.
4. Berger, *Understanding A Photograph*, 3.



Sadie Straus, *Tights*, 2025. Graphic Scan.



Sara Shelton, *Untitled*, 2025. 35mm Film.



Sara Shelton, *Untitled*, 2024. 35mm Film.

VISUAL CREDITS

Reflections on Wolfgang Tillmans' at Centre Pompidou

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Lüneburg (self)*, 2020. Glazed, framed inkjet print. 217 × 145 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York; Maureen Paley, London; David Zwirner, New York / London / Paris / Hong Kong.

A New Look

Women Picket Long Skirts, September 22, 1947. Courtesy of Bettman. Wally Maywald, Christian Dior Haute Couture SS47, Courtesy of Dior.

Memoir

Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, 1948. Tempera on panel, 32 1/4 × 47 3/4" (81.9 x 121.3 cm). New York, New York, MOMA, 16.1949. Courtesy of MOMA.

Art, Ends, and Imitation in Plato's Republic X

G5, 2017, Rachel Harrison; colored pencil over pigment inkjet print. Courtesy the artist; Greene Naftali, New York; and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. © Rachel Harrison

Photography as an Art

John Berger, 2009, Franck Courtes / Agence Vu / Redux. Courtesy of the New Yorker.



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