Houses and Homes

How do artists visually explore ideas of home and all that home can mean?

What can we learn about those who inhabit a space from the way in which an artist depicts it?

The words house and home carry powerful and emotional associations. While house refers to a physical structure meant for habitation and shelter, the meaning of home is infinitely varied, complex, and evocative. This Permanent Collection Portfolio Guide of historic and contemporary works from the Addison’s collection offers varied perspectives and discussion points for the multiple types of dwellings that humans have constructed for themselves, the many ways in which those spaces are inhabited, and the wide range of emotions and associations attached to them.

Educators are encouraged to use this Guide and the expanded Portfolio Image List as a starting point, a place from which to dig deeper, ask questions, and make new connections for class plans and projects.

For online use, click the images in this guide to access digital images in the Addison’s online database.

SELECTED THEMATIC APPROACHES

Homemaking — How do artists represent women’s roles in the family and home?
Roles and Role Play — How do images question the roles we enact in play and in life?
Perspectives on Domestic Life — What choices do artists make in representing domestic spaces?
Portraiture through Objects — How can photographers imbue everyday objects with meaning?
Beneath the Surface — How do artists reveal the cracks in the veneer of the American Dream?
Displacement — What choices are made by artists documenting the impact of natural disasters on communities?
Homemaking

How do artists represent women’s roles in the family and home?

How do artists and the media represent women in the home today?

The adage, “A woman’s work is never done,” is played out in this selection of images of women doing the work of women. Artists such as Edward Burill and Hugh Newell represent the unnamed maids, cooks, and servers, whose domain is the kitchen and the rooms designated for homemaking; the ones who keep the household functioning and remind us of the never-ending work involved in daily living. In contrast, artists such as John Singer Sargent and Philippe Halsman portray women in quite different roles—leading lives of leisure as ornamentation in the domestic environment. With daily chores assigned to others, these women could spread a voluminous skirt around a child in a stylishly appointed living room, or pause at a blue ceramic bowl while wandering through an empty room, all in a world in which time is suspended and the messy business of living is occurring elsewhere.

In the absence of a permanent home, daily life and the details of homemaking must continue. Dorothea Lange’s unpublished image of Florence Thompson caring for one of her children in a migrant worker camp during the Great Depression demonstrates human strength amid great suffering.
Roles and Role Play

How do photographers examine what is real and what is artifice?

How do images question the gender, race, or other roles we enact in play and in life?

In her brief but influential life and career, Francesca Woodman explored the human form in architectural space and issues of self-representation. In her House series, made in an abandoned house using her body as her primary subject, she staged interventions with the architecture. The artist’s figure, which is alternately nude or clad in vintage dress, slips back and forth between visibility and invisibility, sexuality and innocence. In this image of the artist’s blurred figure crouching behind a fireplace, her body seems to dematerialize and meld with the house itself.

To activate a dollhouse interior, photographer Laurie Simmons poses female dolls performing the stereotypical chores of a 1950s housewife. The images of her series In and Around the House are paradoxically sentimental and critical. In describing this work Simmons has said, “I was simply trying to recreate a feeling, a mood . . . a sense of the fifties that I knew was both beautiful and lethal at the same time.”
Perspectives on Domestic Life

What assumptions do we make about personal spaces, based on our own preferences and experiences?

What can we learn about those who inhabit a space from the way in which an artist depicts it?

George Henry Story’s portrait of a family in their dining room and Enoch Wood Perry’s genre scene of a family preparing Thanksgiving dinner in their kitchen, both executed in 1872, provide two contrasting glimpses into late-nineteenth-century domestic life. Story depicts the affluent Boston banker Abner I. Benyon in his fashionably furnished residence in Newton, Massachusetts. Perry paints a more generic family in a happy, if romanticized, scene. The bare wood floor, enormous cooking fireplace, and furnishings reflect the post-Civil War’s Colonial Revival nostalgia for simpler times.

As a news photographer covering the newly sprung suburban communities in California’s Amador Valley, Bill Owens set out like a visual anthropologist to record the customs, environments, and relationships that characterized American middle-class culture in the 1970s. Owens’s relationship with his subjects—friends and neighbors whom he allowed to speak for themselves via surprisingly candid captions, such as the one above—speaks to the trappings of suburban domestic life.
Portraiture through Objects

What assumptions do we make about personal spaces, based on our own perspectives and experiences?

How can photographers imbue everyday objects with meaning and relevance?

William Eggleston transforms the banal "stuff" of everyday life through photography. Photographing "democratically" since the late 1960s, Eggleston considers anything in front of the camera to be worthy of a picture, asking viewers to consider the meaning and relevance of objects and setting.

The images with which we adorn our spaces reflect a portrait of ourselves. William Greiner’s photograph of a refrigerator door shows the influence of the work of his friend Eggleston. Aaron Siskind’s photographs of Harlem and its residents in the 1930s call attention to the cross-class and interracial looking both documented and inherent in their creation.

In 1967, photographer Danny Lyon spent fourteen months documenting six prison units in Texas, where he became friends with prisoners and recorded his experience through photography and writing. The result of this journey is a series of images showing an unprejudiced portrait of real people and the spaces they are ordered to inhabit, marked by a high degree of emotion and empathy.
Beneath the Surface

How do artists reveal the cracks in the veneer of the American Dream?

How can images use surrealism and the bizarre to prompt viewers to question assumptions about normalcy?

In contrast to the usual critical depiction of the suburbs as a sterile, even sinister, cultural vacuum, Bill Owens’s photos of cookie-cutter houses and backyard barbecues offer a more even-handed and complex view. (See additional images on page 4) While capturing the post-war optimism about the better life afforded by these suburban enclaves, his series Suburbia, with powerful captions quoted from those photographed, such as those above, also reveals cracks in the veneer.

In the photographic series Dream House by Gregory Crewdson, suburbia and surrealism collide. Casting a number of Hollywood actors in the roles of nameless suburbanites, Crewdson collaborated with a team of twenty production professionals to convert a vacant ranch house in rural Vermont into an elaborate stage set with precise compositions and elaborate artificial lighting. The moments captured in each of the frames range in character from the mundane to the forlorn, from the bizarre to the tragic.
Displacement

How can connecting with objects and spaces reflective of those in our own lives prompt viewers to empathize with the experiences of others?

What are the moral implications of finding beauty in destruction?

Devoid of human presence yet packed with detritus, the color photographs of Robert Polidori, Joel Sternfeld, and Katherine Wolkoff capture moments in which the sanctity of home has been violated by natural disaster. Scattered objects, deteriorated surfaces, and severe damage to the structural integrity of the houses depicted in the artists’ images—whether interior spaces or exterior views—reflect the larger issues of physical and social displacement that societies experience in the wake of such natural disasters as floods and hurricanes. The aftermath of these tragic events, which affected areas of the United States as geographically diverse as the West coast and the Gulf coast, provided, nonetheless, fertile ground for the creation of aesthetically rich and emotionally captivating imagery. Artists have been compelled to record the mighty force of nature overpowering mankind for centuries; by choosing to show the quiet after the storm instead of focusing on the phenomenon at its climax, these three artists have found an unexpectedly contemplative pictorial strategy.
Curriculum Connections and Resources

**SUGGESTED CLASSROOM CONNECATIONS**

**History/Social Studies**
- The American Dream
- gender roles
- social documentation

**English**
- texts that explore the various meanings of home
- symbolism
- setting as character
- identity and place
- character development
- interiors and exteriors
- gender identity
- roles and role play

**Art**
- architecture
- drawing in perspective
- narrative
- works in series
- landscape
- mapping
- social documentation

**Science**
- ecology
- urban development and environmental impact
- relationships between humans and nature
- environmental ethics
- developing sustainable communities

**CONNECTIONS TO ADDITIONAL THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS**

- Representing the Land
- American Identity
- Gender
- Types/Stereotypes
- Humans and Nature
- Urbanization
- Family

**TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES**

Download the Teacher Exhibition Guide *Home Sweet Home* from the Winter 2016 exhibition *Walls and Beams, Rooms and Dreams: Images of Home*. [https://addison.andover.edu/Education/PreK12/Pages/CurriculumPackets.aspx](https://addison.andover.edu/Education/PreK12/Pages/CurriculumPackets.aspx)


A documentary film about the acclaimed photographer, filmed over a decade as he creates his most haunting, stunningly elaborate images.