Andrea Robbins and Max Becher Bio

Max Becher was born in 1964, Düsseldorf, Germany. Andrea Robbins was born in 1963, Boston, MA. Both received their BFA at Cooper Union in 1986. Andrea attended Hunter College School of Art in New York City, and Max received his MFA from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. They are unique in that they are artists who are married, and have collaborated for twenty years.

Becher and Robbins are artists who make photo-based conceptual work on the subject of the "transportation of place." Max teaches in the Digital Media Area of the School of Art and Art History at the University of Florida. Andrea teaches in the photography department at the University of Florida with an emphasis on the conceptual meaning behind formal conventions. Andrea and Max have taught at the Cooper Union and various other institutions. Their work is in the collections of The Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Whitney Museum of Art, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; The New School of Social Research, New York; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; St. Louis Museum of Art, Ohio; The Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, Illinois; Center for Creative Photography, Arizona; Maison Européen de la Photographie (MEP), Paris, France.

Their work has been published and exhibited internationally. They are represented by Sonnabend Gallery in New York.

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher: Portraits
Lesson I

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher take portraits in much the same way they photograph locations, by seeking out exceptional situations in which people and their environments strongly resemble other, distant ones due to the effects of colonialism, immigration, diaspora, globalism, or tourism.

In this lesson, students will discuss and learn the immediate and obvious concepts that Max Becher and Andrea Robbins's photographs reveal.

Time Required	One (1) class period
Grade Level	High School

Notes to the Teacher
This lesson plan is part of a series of lesson plans and activities, which consists of
- Two (2) lessons prior to visiting the exhibition
- One (1) visit to the exhibition
- One (1) post exhibition activity

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to
1. Determine the obvious subject matter in a photograph
2. Pose questions that would reveal the subject matter
3. Compare concepts within the series of photographs
4. See similarities and differences between the series of photographs
5. Develop critical thinking pertaining to works of art

VOCABULARY

Identity – Set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group; the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.

Ethnicity – Identity with or membership in a particular racial, national, or cultural group and observance of that group's customs, beliefs, and language[1].

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[1] Note: Many minority groups in the United States maintain strong ethnic identity; especially in cities, immigrants are often attracted to ethnic communities established by people from their own country, communities in which many traditional cultural features are maintained.

Stereotype – A standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or <mark>uncritical</mark> judgment[MSOffice1]

Race – a local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics[2].

MATERIALS

- Power Point presentation to display during discussion (presentation would best be displayed as an overhead projection)

- Q&A to distribute to students

- Basic information form to distribute to students

INSTRUCTIONS/PROCEDURES

Introduction

The teacher will introduce the artists Andrea Robbins and Max Becher by talking about their background (information sheet will be provided).

Demonstration/Discussion

Distribute student packets after introduction. Display the appropriate Power Point presentation for the class to see. Introduce each set of portraits and discuss them by using the Q&A sheet. As each set of portraits is discussed, vocabulary words will arise. First, define the word by asking the class what it means to them and then read aloud the definition provided.

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[2] Usage Note: The notion of race is nearly as problematic from a scientific point of view as it is from a social one. European physical anthropologists of the 17th and 18th centuries proposed various systems of racial classifications based on such observable characteristics as skin color, hair type, body proportions, and skull measurements; essentially codifying the perceived differences among broad geographic populations of humans. The traditional terms for these populations—Caucasoid (or Caucasian), Mongoloid, Negroid, and in some systems Australoid—are now controversial in both technical and non-technical usage, and in some cases they may well be considered offensive. (Caucasian does retain a certain currency in American English, but it is used almost exclusively to mean "white" or "European" rather than "belonging to the Caucasian race," a group that includes a variety of peoples generally categorized as non-white.) The biological aspect of race is described today not in observable physical features but rather in such genetic characteristics as blood groups and metabolic processes, and the groupings indicated by these factors seldom coincide very neatly with those put forward by earlier physical anthropologists. Citing this and other points—such as the fact that a person who is considered black in one society might be non-black in another—many cultural anthropologists now consider race to be more a social or mental construct than an objective biological fact.

Questions and Answers Lesson I
<div align="center">Identity</div>

Bavarian by Law
Photo:
Mayfest, 1995-1996

Describe what you see in this photo.

What specifically helps you determine the *identity* of these people?

How has the *identity* of these people changed over time – what do they look like today?

What is the *identity* of your family and neighborhood? What sets your family and neighborhood apart from others?

Has the *identity* of your family/neighborhood changed over time?

If yes, how?

<u>Ethnicity</u>

Postville
Photo:
Lawn Mowing, 2005

Describe what you see in this photo.

What is the *ethnicity* of the person in the photo?

What indicates that this person is of a specific *ethnicity*?

Even though this person is of a specific *ethnicity*, do you think they are integrated within the society they live?

What is the *ethnicity* of your family or neighborhood?

Is your family still a part of an ethnic group?

If yes, do you follow many of the same traditions as your predecessors (ancestors)?

<u>Stereotype</u>

Figures 2002
Photo:
Luke Skywalker, 2002

Describe what you see in this photo.

Even though these two figures represent the same character, what are the differences between them? Describe.

By looking at their appearance, what do you think their personal characteristics would be?

Figure on the right:

Figure on the left:

Race

German Indians 1997/1998

Photo:

Man with Blackened Face (Black Face), 1997-1998

Describe what you see in this photo.

Why do you think this person is dressed like this?

Where do you think this person is?

Do you think he is being sensitive to the issue of *race*?

Do you think he is making a mockery of the Indians, or do you think he is being genuine?

Photo:

Blonde, 1997-1998

Describe what you see in this photo.

What do you think she is portraying?

Further exploration of the term <u>Race</u>

How do you define *race*?

Do you think there is such a thing as *race*?

List at least two ways you most often talk or think about *race*.

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher: Portraits
Lesson II

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher take portraits in much the same way they photograph locations, by seeking out exceptional situations in which people and their environments strongly resemble other, distant environments due to the effects of colonialism, immigration, diaspora, globalism, or tourism.

This lesson will be a continuation of Lesson I but it will delve deeper into the subject matter of the portraits. The students will discuss and learn the more hidden and concealed concepts that Max Becher and Andrea Robbins's photographs reveal.

Time Required   One (1) class period
Grade Level   High School

Notes to the Teacher
This lesson plan is part of a series of lesson plans and activities, which consists of
- Two (2) lessons prior to visiting the exhibition
- One (1) visit to the exhibition
- One (1) post exhibition activity

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to
6. Determine the hidden and concealed subject matter in a photograph
7. Pose questions that would reveal the subject matter
8. Compare concepts within the series of photographs
9. See similarities and differences between the series of photographs
10. Develop critical thinking pertaining to works of art

VOCABULARY

Colonialism – The control of one nation by "transplanted" people of another nation—often a geographically distant nation that has a different culture and dominant racial or ethnic group.

*Immigrate –*To enter and settle in a country or region to which one is not native.

*Diaspora –*The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel from the sixth century B.C., when they[MSOffice2] were exiled to Babylonia, until the present time. A dispersion of a people from their original homeland. A dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity, such as a language or culture.

Globalism – A national geo-political policy in which the entire world is regarded as the appropriate sphere for a state's influence.

Tourism – The practice of traveling for pleasure.

MATERIALS

- Power Point presentation to display during discussion (presentation would best be displayed as an overhead projection)

- Q&A to distribute to students

- Basic information form to distribute to students

PROCEDURES

Demonstration/Discussion
- Distribute student packets
- Display the appropriate Power Point presentation for the class to view
- Introduce each set of portraits and discuss them using the Q&A sheets
- Discuss sets of portraits and vocabulary words together
- Encourage discussion of the vocabulary words from the students' perspectives first, followed by a clear reading of the definition provided

Take-Home Assignment: Photography Project
Each student will be given a disposable camera, but if they prefer they may use their own digital cameras (please avoid cell phone cameras).

The goal of the project is to take photographs following one or two of the concepts that Becher and Robbins use to find their subjects. The students should be asked to take photos that clearly show or explore issues of race, ethnicity, stereotype, identity, immigration, tourism, and/or globalism. Each student may choose his or her subject matter. Before taking pictures, the students should discuss or propose the concept(s), as a photographer, they would like to explore, based on the Pre-Assignment Questions. They should have a clear notion of what they will photograph before they start taking pictures.

The images will be developed and each student's three best images will be selected for group critique/review. One overall image is selected and printed larger, and shown along with other student photographs. Each student should write a brief statement about their selected photograph.

Pre-Assignment Questions
1. Which one or two concepts discussed in class are you most interested in as discussed in class?

Circle one or two:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Stereotype
- Identity
- Immigration
- Tourism
- Globalism

2. Why are you most interested in the subject(s)?

3. Using this subject(s) as a guiding idea, photograph someone in such a way as to show the concept or subject. Carefully consider whom you would like to photograph, and how this person could best show the concept(s).

How does the context—or setting—of the photograph contribute to the subject(s) selected from the class and exhibition tour discussions?

Questions and Answers Lesson II

<u>Colonialism</u>

Colonial Remains 1991
Photo:
Herero Day V, 1991

Describe what you see in this photo.

Describe the clothes worn by the people in the photo.

The women[MSOffice3]:

The man:

What do you think these people are celebrating?

What specific time or place do you think influenced the clothing worn in the photo? Do the clothes still have elements of the indigenous (native) society?

Do you think the country that *colonized* the people in the photo is still influencing their culture, i.e., their clothes, business, language, traditions?

<u>Immigration</u>

The Americans of Samana 1998/2001
Photo:
Franklin Wilmore, English Teacher, 1998-2001

Describe what you see in this photo.

After reading this man's background information, do you think he sees himself as American, African, or Dominican?

What does *immigration* mean to you?

From where did your parents come?

Do you have classmates who came from other countries? Do you speak with them about what *immigration* means to them? Describe here.

What conflicts do you imagine *immigration* brings to a person's life, or what kinds of issues might an *immigrant* encounter when moving to a new country? List at least three issues.

<u>Diaspora</u>

Sosua, Dominican Republic 1999/2000
Photo:
*Arturo Kircheimer and Daughter-in-law (Kircheimer Porch),*1999-2000

Describe what you see in this photo.

Where do you think they are?

What ethnicity do you think each person is?

Do you think they are happy where they are?

Diaspora–A dispersion of a people from their original homeland. A dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity, such as a language or culture.

Discuss with your teacher and classmates the idea of *diaspora*—how the man in this photograph had to leave his home country.

What kind of life do you think he made for himself in this new place?

Tourism/Globalism

Bavarian by Law 1995/1996
Photo:
Parade March, 1995-1996

Describe what you see in this photo.

What do you think is the reason for this parade?

Why do you think the whole town changed its identity?

What do you think is gained and lost when a town changes its identity for the sake of *tourism*?

Further exploration of the term <u>Globalism</u>

Define *globalism*.

How does *globalism* affect local communities?

What does global awareness mean to you?

How do you preserve global diversity?

What are the difficulties of *globalism*? How can a global economy bring about injustice and inequality?

How can money ultimately influence the assimilation of a culture or how can it <mark>wash down</mark>[MSOffice4] a culture?

Questions & Answers during Exhibition Tour

The Oregon Vortex 1994
Photo:
#2, 1994

Describe what you see in this photo.

Who is taller in the photo on the right and who is taller in the photo on the left?

Why do you think each person appears larger in one photo and smaller in the other?

How does the context of this photo change the way we view this person?

Does context matter when we judge a person?

What have you learned from how we view people depending on the context?