

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

Educator's Guide

John Stezaker

January 27 – April 23, 2012

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for educators bringing their students to view *John Stezaker*, on view at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum from January 27 – April 23, 2012. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, gallery discussions, and post-visit suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and make meaning of the art presented. Teachers at all grade levels should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful to their students. Vocabulary words that appear in **bold** are defined at the end of the guide.

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John Stezaker, *Love XI*, 2006. Collage, 9 3/8 x 7 1/8". Private collection, Switzerland. © John Stezaker.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

The lure of images lies at the heart of the work of contemporary British artist John Stezaker. Using classic **film stills**, vintage postcards, and book illustrations, Stezaker makes **collages** that are nostalgic but also uncanny and absurd. By adjusting, inverting, and slicing separate pictures together to create new works of art, he explores the subversive force of **found images**. This first major museum exhibition of his work offers a chance to see art whose subject is the power of the act of looking itself. With over ninety works spanning the 1970s to today, this exhibition invites the viewer to reflect on how visual language can create new meaning.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts, Art History, Photography, Film Studies, Gender Studies, Writing, Literature, Psychology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will discuss how John Stezaker engages with the history of collage, Surrealism, and the use of **appropriation** in visual art.
- Students will discuss the role that images have in shaping everyday culture.
- Students will explore the psychological and mental components of viewing Stezaker's artwork and how new meanings can be created through the **juxtaposition** of images.

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BEFORE YOU VISIT

Suggested topics to explore, research, and discuss with your students before visiting the exhibition.

Image Culture | all grade levels

Have you ever stumbled upon an image in daily life that interested you in some way? The next time you are in a public setting, pause for a minute to consider the images surrounding you. What aesthetic qualities can you find in the non-art images around you? Everyday culture is dominated by images—on signs, in advertisements, in magazines and newspapers—and by videos, which the Internet has made more accessible than ever. Early in his career as an artist, John Stezaker became interested in working with these types of images and **film stills** and wondered if creating a work of art could be as simple as taking an image out of circulation.¹ By cropping and combining portions of images that were once part of daily culture, Stezaker’s work invites the viewer to stop and look closely, an idea that goes against our fast-paced, image-obsessed society and that challenges conventional ideas about what art can be.



Pablo Picasso, *La bouteille de Suze (Bottle of Suze)*, 1912. Pasted papers, gouache, and charcoal, 25 3/4 x 19 3/4". Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis. University purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946.

Collage and Found Images | middle and high school level

John Stezaker’s work continues a tradition of **collage** and working with found materials that the French Cubists introduced to the art world in the early 20th century. By including printed **ephemera** such as scraps of newspaper and wallpaper in their work, Cubists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque merged the “low,” everyday elements of the modern city with the “high” culture of fine art. Since then, collage has played an important role in a number of major art movements, including Dada, Surrealism, and Pop art. In particular, Stezaker cites the Berlin Dadaist Hannah Höch and the Surrealist collages of Joseph Cornell as influences on his work.² Research these collage artists and others who were a part of the Dada and Surrealist movements. In what ways are their collages similar in style and in theme to Stezaker’s work? How does Stezaker’s artwork differ?

Surrealism | middle and high school level

Surrealism was an artistic, political, and literary movement that began in Paris in the 1920s and engaged with Sigmund Freud’s ideas of the unconscious and the importance of dreams. Surrealists sought to access the subconscious in order to explore the creative abilities of the unrestricted mind, often using techniques such as automatic drawing, or drawing while suppressing conscious control, to produce spontaneous and bizarre images. By pairing unrelated images, John Stezaker relies on the power of the viewer’s conscious and subconscious mind to unite the images and make sense of the seemingly irrational pairing. In what other ways is Stezaker’s work “surreal”? How has the Surrealist movement influenced other contemporary artists?

¹ See Michael Bracewell, “Behind the Lines: the Art of John Stezaker,” in *John Stezaker* (London: Ridinghouse and Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 11.

² See Dawn Ades, “John Stezaker, *Monteur*,” in *John Stezaker*, 28.

IN THE GALLERY

Ideas to consider when visiting the exhibition.

John Stezaker works in thematic series, such as *Marriage*, *The 3rd Person Archive*, and *Mask*, in which he **manipulates** found photographs or **appropriated** images that he takes out of circulation, alters, and returns in a different context. Stezaker makes a conscious decision to only work with images already in existence, referring to this repurposing as the “afterlife” of the image. Interestingly, Stezaker usually uses only two to three images in his **collages**. This limited number of images means decisions about where and what to cut are vital, and the cutting itself must be precise and exact. He has an uncanny ability to find unexpected connections between seemingly disparate images. In your opinion, which collage series in the exhibition represents this ability best?



John Stezaker, *Marriage (Film Portrait Collage) LXI*, 2010. Collage, 11 3/16 x 8 1/2". Courtesy of the artist and The Approach, London. © John Stezaker.

Art Interaction: *Marriage (Film Portrait Collage) series* middle and high school level

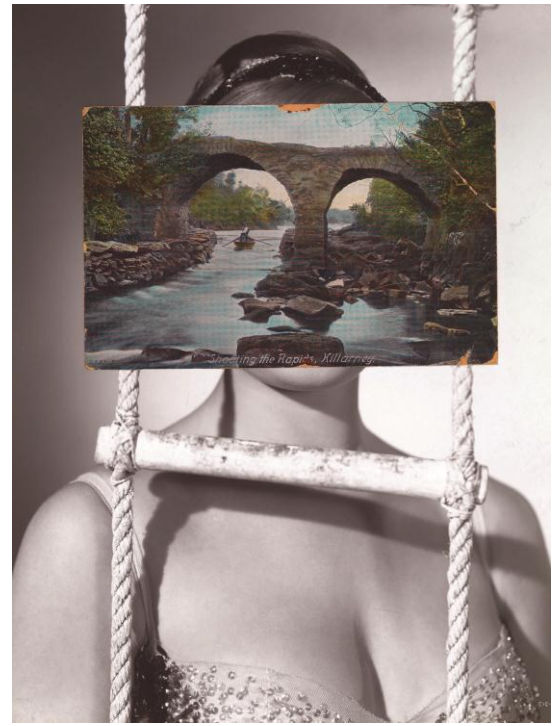
Stezaker's *Marriage (Film Portrait Collage)* series is an exploration of the human face and how the matching of two very different faces creates a 'marriage' for the beholder who is left to make connections. The source material for Stezaker's *Marriage* series is comprised of actors' head shots. When viewed alone, these portraits may seem posed, stereotypical, and idealized, but when combined by the artist, they become more interesting and alive. The viewer is aware of their humanness but also that something is askew, creating feelings of both empathy and distance. What is an example in contemporary culture where humans feel empathy for a celebrity or other public figure that they have no connection to whatsoever? How is it possible to feel empathy but be so distant from the real person? The *Marriage* series also exposes stereotypes, particularly in the male / female gender combinations. Name some stereotypes that you see. How has Stezaker exposed these stereotypes?

Art Interaction: *The 3rd Person Archive series* middle and high school level

The 3rd Person Archive series is an example of Stezaker's work with **found images** where he uses a fragment of an image as the finished piece, rather than creating a collage. To create *The 3rd Person Archive*, Stezaker cut out fragments of figures, usually shown in motion on streets and in squares, from topographical photographs—mainly a prewar *Photographic Atlas of World Geography*. These figures were captured accidentally and were incidental to the photographer's purpose. Who is the 3rd person that Stezaker is referencing in the series title? How does *The 3rd Person Archive* reveal the nuances and many ways of watching? What is the relationship between the viewer and the work of art? This series explores the notion of the **voyeur**, a spectator who watches someone without him or her knowing. How does it make you feel to be in the position of the voyeur? How do the small scale, marginality, and anonymity of the figures add to the sense of voyeurism?

Art Interaction: *Mask series* all grade levels

After the demise of large, luxurious, single-screen movie palaces in the 1970s, boxes of **film stills** and actors' headshots began appearing in thrift stores and flea markets. Stezaker is drawn to these images and purchases them to use in his work. In Stezaker's *Mask series*, the main figure's face is fully or partially blocked by a landscape postcard or other **collage** element, thus exploring ideas of concealment and opposites. In particular, the use of postcards illustrating scenes from nature explores the opposites of wild / civilized, tamed / untamed, and order / chaos. What holds more interest for you, the part of the image that is concealed or the part that is concealing? Some of the landscape postcards used as masks seem to be almost facelike or to act as portals. When meeting new people, what acts as the entry point or portal to their personalities? By essentially blinding these figures and concealing their faces, Stezaker forces the viewer to find other ways of identifying and connecting with the subject. How have masks been used by humans in the past and present? Are there generally good or bad connotations related to the use of masks?



John Stezaker, *Mask X*, 1982. Collage, 9 11/16 x 7 1/8". Ringier Collection, Switzerland. © John Stezaker.

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

Explore these connections to artworks on view in the Kemper Art Museum's permanent collection.



Max Ernst, *L'oeil du silence (The Eye of Silence)*, 1943-44. Oil on canvas, 43 1/4 x 56 1/4". Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis. University purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1946.

Max Ernst, *L'oeil du silence (The Eye of Silence)*, 1943–44

German-born painter **Max Ernst** (1891–1976) was an important participant in the Dada and Surrealist movements in Europe following World War I. This painting, which appears to depict an eerie lake surrounded by rock formations, was painted while Ernst was living in exile in the United States. To create some of the undulating forms, Ernst employed a technique called *decalcomania*, which involves pressing paint onto the canvas using a flat surface like cardboard or glass. By incorporating this element of chance along with ambiguous, organic forms, Ernst allows the viewer to form associations and interpretations of the painting, much like the way Stezaker relies on the viewer to form connections between the **juxtaposed** bodies and natural landscapes in his *Mask series*. What other similarities can you find between *The Eye of Silence* and Stezaker's collages?



Jacques Mahé de La Villeglé, *Rue du Temple – manuscrite*, 1968

In an interview, John Stezaker made the statement “images that were already in this world were so much more fascinating than anything I could create.”³ Jacques Villeglé (b. 1926) is a French **collage** artist who also works with **appropriated** material. To produce works such as *Rue du Temple – manuscrite*, Villeglé uses fragments of torn posters from city walls—in this case, from the wall of a street in Paris called Rue du Temple. The resulting collage has abstract lines and shapes, but the words left on the posters—like “armées” (armies), “révolutionnaires” (revolutionaries), and “pour les travailleurs” (for the workers)—connect the work of art to the context from which it was taken. What can you deduce about the cultural atmosphere in Paris in 1968 from the words on *Rue du Temple*? Do Stezaker’s collages remain connected to their original cultural context? Why or why not? How are Stezaker’s and Villeglé’s collages different in style?

Jacques Mahé de La Villeglé, *Rue du Temple – manuscrite*, 1968. Torn posters mounted on canvas, 45 5/8 x 31 13/16". Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis. University purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shoenberg; Mrs. R. A. Frevert in memory of her son; the Samuel Kootz Gallery; Rabbi and Mrs. F. M. Isserman; Mr. and Mrs. James W. Singer, Jr.; and Mr. and Mrs. John Shoenberg, by exchange, 2011.



Andrea Fraser, *Untitled (Pollock / Titian) #4*, 1984 / 2005

Andrea Fraser is an American performance artist (b. 1965) known for popularizing the concept of institutional critique, or an artistic practice that comments on the organizations involved with the display and sale of works of art. Fraser produced *Untitled (Pollock / Titian) #4* through the appropriation of other artworks. However, rather than creating a collage, Fraser superimposed an image of a painting by Titian, a 16th-century Italian painter, and an image of a painting by Jackson Pollock, an American Abstract Expressionist known for his drip paintings from the late 1940s. The resulting work of art is somewhat disorienting and produces a visual dissonance similar to many of Stezaker’s collages. How is this “marriage” of images similar to Stezaker’s *Marriage* series? In what ways are the images different? Is either artist commenting on the relationship between men and women?

Andrea Fraser, *Untitled (Pollock / Titian) #4*, 1984 / 2005. Digital C-print, 1/5, 40 x 61". Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis. University purchase, Parsons Fund, 2006.

IN THE CLASSROOM OR AT HOME

Follow your visit to the museum with one or more of these suggested activities.

- Gather your own **found images** relating to themes in Stezaker’s work and create a collage using minimal **manipulations**.
- Research and select a contemporary **film still** and then write a story to accompany the chosen image.
- Review newspaper and magazine articles dealing with celebrities and contemporary society. Keep count and make note of any references to their image or appearance. Summarize your findings on how this reflects (positively or negatively) on society.
- Make your own mask using an appropriated image or postcard. What image did you choose to represent or camouflage yourself? Why?

³ John Stezaker, in conversation with Christophe Gallois and Daniel F. Herrmann, “The Third Meaning,” in *John Stezaker*, 36.

VOCABULARY

1. **Appropriation** – the use of pre-existing objects or images with little transformation. In contemporary art, it is a practice that is often associated with a critique of the notions of originality and authenticity.
2. **Collage** – a type of picture (and also to the technique used in creating such pictures) in which objects such as photographs, news clippings, and pieces of printed paper are pasted on to a flat surface, often in combination with painted passages (the word comes from the French *coller*, to glue).
3. **Duality** – an instance of opposition or contrast between two concepts or two aspects of something; or, the quality of being of two parts.
4. **Ephemera** – things that exist or are used for only a short time; often used to refer to artifacts, especially printed or manuscript ones, that have only a brief usefulness before they are discarded. Examples include items such as notes, postcards, tickets, posters, and receipts.
5. **Film still** – a photograph taken on or off the set of a movie during production and used to promote a film or film star. Because film stills are often posed, they do not necessarily represent scenes from the actual film.
6. **Found image** – an image used by the artist that he or she has not made, but has found and incorporated into a work of art.
7. **Juxtaposition** – the act of positioning things next to each other, especially for comparison or contrast.
8. **Manipulate** – to handle, alter, or control in a skillful manner.
9. **Metaphor** – a figure of speech in which a word, phrase, or concept is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable.
10. **Silhouette** – the dark shape and outline of someone or something visible against a brighter background; or, a portrait of a person in profile showing the outline only, usually cut out of black paper, extremely popular c.1750–1850 as the quickest and cheapest method of portraiture.
11. **Voyeur** – a spectator who watches an individual that is usually unaware of being observed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

- David Evans, ed., *Appropriation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009).
- Matthew Gale, *Dada & Surrealism* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1997).
- John Stezaker (London: Ridinghouse and Whitechapel Gallery, 2010).
- Brandon Taylor, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

Influences

Stezaker is influenced by a number of philosophers and theoretical texts, which include:

- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958), trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
- Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author" (1967), in his *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).
- William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (1977) (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

Articles

- Michael Bracewell, "Demand the Impossible," *Frieze Magazine* no. 89 (March 2005): 88–93.
http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/demand_the_impossible/.
- Catherine M. Prudhoe, "Picture Books and the Art of Collage," *Childhood Education* 80, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 6–11.

Online

- Artist's talk with John Stezaker at Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Modern Grand-Duc Jean:
Part 1: <http://youtu.be/hdzkJDAbu58>
Part 2: http://youtu.be/dA9-gs_KcX8
- Collageart.org, accessed November 16, 2011: <http://www.collageart.org>.
- Video interview of John Stezaker discussing his work in the *Tate Triennial 2006*:
<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/triennial/video.shtm>.
- Video interview with John Stezaker in his studio: ASX.TV: John Stezaker – "The Studio":
<http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/12/asx-tv-john-stezaker-the-studio-2011.html>.

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