

Philosophy @ The Virtual Art Museum: Photography



Alfred Steiglitz, *Georgia O'Keefe*, 1923, Museum of Modern Art, New York

1. What features of this photographic portrait stand out for you?
2. Does this photograph contain an expression of the photographer's attitude towards its subject?
3. What does the photograph convey about the person portrayed in it?
4. How does learning that the person in the photograph is the photographer's wife change your understanding of it if at all?

Edward Burtynsky, *Nickel Tailings #30*, Sudbury, Ontario, 1996, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

1. What elements of this photograph stand out for you?
2. Do you think this photograph is beautiful?
3. What attitude do you think the photographer has towards nature?
4. How does finding out that the intense colors in this photograph are due to toxic chemicals that have been dumped onto the land affect your appreciation of it?



Philosophy @ The Virtual Art Museum: Abstract Art



Maya Daren, *Portrait of Carol Janeway*, 1943,
Museum of Modern Art, New York

1. Is this photograph realistic?
2. How do you think it was made?
3. What is the significance of the fact that this photograph is composed of two different images?
4. Is this photograph a trick?
5. Does it convey something specific about the sitter?

Philosophy Questions:

1. What are the most significant differences you see between a painting and a photograph?
2. Do you think that photographs are more (or less) realistic than paintings? What exactly does this claim mean? Are there different ways in which a photograph or painting can be realistic?
3. How are digital photographs different than ones made using the traditional method of recording the image on a celluloid negative? (If you don't know how this works, traditionally cameras had film in them and the image was recorded on the film, which had to then be developed and then printed. This is a very different process than digital cameras use, in part because the image was analogue rather than digital.) Are there things that can be done with a digital photograph that cannot be done with a film-based one? What are some examples? How about the reverse? Is one form of photography superior to the other?
4. Does the fact that photographs can now be digitally altered affect your sense of the reality of a photograph? How? Does this affect the degree to which you "trust" what you see in a photograph?
5. In what sense do you think photographs resemble the things they are of? Are they different than paintings in this way?
6. Do you trust a photograph more than you trust a painting? In what way(s)? Why? Are there ways in which you trust paintings more than photographs?

**This page was printed from the website Philosophy @ The Virtual Art Museum and is reproduced in accordance with a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercialShareAlike 4.0 International License.*