

## Oral History of Illinois Agriculture



### Landscape Photography

## Illinois State Museum



[Http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us](http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us)

## Landscape Photography

### Michael Johnson

One of the farmers interviewed in the AVBarn is Michael Johnson of Carroll County, Illinois. On his tree farm, he grows more than 40 species of hardwood trees. As they mature, he cuts them and mills them to make fine lumber that he sells to furniture and cabinet makers.

Michael is also a fine art photographer. He has photographed the rural Illinois and Midwestern landscape for 40 years. In his oral history interview, he describes his art, how he got started, what equipment he uses, and what his

inspiration is. He looks back at European art of 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland.

In this activity, we will look at Michael's work on his website, listen to his interview where he speaks about his art, and look at some of the Dutch landscapes he uses as a model.

Then we will take a ride through countryside looking for interesting views we can photograph with a digital camera, go home and upload them into a photo program on the computer, and turn them into a print.



*Michael Johnson:  
Tree Farmer and  
Landscape Photographer*

### Special points of interest:

- Introduction
- Oral History
- Dutch Landscapes
- Jacob Van Ruysdael
- Michael Johnson's Gallery
- Get Out on the Road
- Processing Photos
- Our Gallery
- For Art Teachers



*Road, Wacker  
Michael Johnson  
Illinois State Museum Collection*

## *Learn from the Oral History*

<http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us/viewclip/2522>

photograph them – shape of land, color, skies, light and dark, composition, trees, rocks,...?

### **Michael's oral history:**

As you listen to the video clip about his photography, think about these questions:

1. What does he like about Ruisdael and other Dutch painters of the 1600s?

2. What parts of landscape attract him to

3. How is light important to him?

4. Why does he photograph only in black and white?

## *17th Century Dutch Landscape Painting*

### **Information on Landscape from the Getty Institute:**

[http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/landscapes/background1.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/landscapes/background1.html)

This is a short history of landscape painting in Europe, ending with today's use of photography to depict landscapes.

**Write** a short list of the characteristics of Dutch landscapes.

**Write** a short description of the feelings these paintings give you about nature.

[http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/landscapes/lesson02.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/landscapes/lesson02.html)

Learn about the effects artists can **create with foreground, middleground, and background** areas of a landscape.

## *Jacob van Ruisdael*

See the Wikipedia entry for Jacob van Ruisdael to learn more about his style.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob\\_Isaakszoon\\_van\\_Ruisdael](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Isaakszoon_van_Ruisdael)

To get a quick idea about the look of 17th century Dutch landscape, do a

**Google® search** of Images for 'Ruisdael paintings'.

You will get pages of images of landscapes with large cloudy skies over dark tree shapes and old buildings.

Go to:

[http://www.metmuseum.org/works\\_of\\_art/collection\\_database/european\\_paintings/wheat\\_fields\\_jacob\\_van\\_ruisdael/objectview.aspx?collID=11&OID=110002002](http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/european_paintings/wheat_fields_jacob_van_ruisdael/objectview.aspx?collID=11&OID=110002002)

To see an large version of the painting to the right. Compare that to the Johnson photo on Page 1 of this activity. What similarities are there? Is the feeling of the two similar or different? How?



*Wheat Fields*  
Jacob van Ruisdael, 1670  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

## *Michael Johnson's Gallery online*

<http://www.michaeljohnsonphotography.com/>

Spend a little time at Michael Johnson's online photo gallery.

Click on Artist's Statement to read how he creates his images.

Click on Images to see a series of landscapes of the East, Midwest, and West of the U.S.

Pick out one of the images that you think reminds you of Ruisdael's paintings. What elements of it are reminiscent of those of the Dutch painter?

- \_\_\_ division of foreground, middleground, and background
- \_\_\_ proportion of sky to land
- \_\_\_ values of light and dark
- \_\_\_ choice of subject matter
- \_\_\_ line or composition of shapes
- \_\_\_ other quality I noticed... \_\_\_\_\_

**Explain your choices.**

## *Get Out on the Road*

Scout ahead for an area of countryside on a back road near you that might provide you with interesting views.

Pick a day when there are clouds in the sky, perhaps it looks like it might rain later, or has just rained. Go to the area you scouted.

Take a few shots with your digital camera for practice. As you can

see immediate results (and delete the mistakes), you can do test shooting in all directions (toward, away from, or in other direction from the sun), finding those that give good results and no glare.

Thinking back to Michael's photos and Ruisdael's landscapes, look for scenes that have an interesting composition, lines of direction, high contrast, movement of clouds, or other abstract qualities

that Michael talked about.

You might want to include old buildings, big trees, roads, fences, and other man-made objects in your composition, without necessarily making them the focus.

Next, go home and process your photos.

## *Processing Your Photos*

Upload your photos into Photoshop®, Gimp® or other image manipulation software program.

Review what Michael said about the power of black and white photos. After saving a copy of your originals, change the mode to grayscale and save a copy of each (this will be a large file).

Then, one at a time, manipulate each grayscale photo for levels,

brightness and contrast, and sharpness. You can also crop your images to make a composition with a large sky or a wide, short rectangular shape.

When you are satisfied with your images, scale or size them to 300dpi and about eight by ten inches for printing. Save as jpgs. Print out your best few on photo paper if you wish to frame them. Do not be discouraged if it is harder than you thought to capture

a landscape in black and white that has elements such as contrast and harmony. If you realize this, you have certainly learned a lot.

You can send your best digital photograph from this activity to You-Tube, Facebook, or other social networking pages for public consumption. Send the URL to us so we can put the link on our User-generated Activity Page. We would love to see your work, and Michael would, too.

## *Our Activity Gallery*

Here are two examples of digital black and white landscape photography created by members of the ISM staff as they did this activity.

There are also two early 20th century black and white photographs from glass plate negatives by Frank Sadorus from the Museum's collection.



*Get Your Kicks* by Meredith Mahoney. View of the original Route 66 south of Springfield. By permission of M. Mahoney



*Sky Over Prairie* by Frank Sadorus, ca. 1910. ISM Collection



*Untitled* by Frank Sadorus, ca. 1910. Railroad tower, pond and horse in Sadorus, eastern Illinois. ISM Collection



*Slough in a Cattle Pasture* by Bruce MacMillan, 2006. Meramec River in Missouri.

## *For Art Teachers—Learning Standards*

**Illinois Fine Arts Standards Addressed:** Any or all, depending on which aspects of art you are focusing on—art history, aesthetics, or art criticism, art production.

**25a: A. Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive qualities of the arts.**

**25.A.2d Late Elementary:** Identify and describe the elements of 2- and 3-dimensional space, figure ground, value and form; the principles of rhythm, size, proportion and composition; and the expressive qualities of symbol and story.

**25.A.3e Middle School:** Analyze how the elements and principles can be organized to convey meaning through a variety of media and technology.

**26:B. Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.**

**26.B.4d High School:** Demonstrate knowledge and skills that communicate clear and focused ideas based on planning, research and problem solving.

**27B: Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.**

**27.B.3 Middle School:** Know and describe how artists and their works shape culture and increase understanding of societies, past and present.

**27.B.4a High School:** Analyze and classify the distinguishing characteristics of historical and contemporary art works by style, period and culture.

## *National Art Standards — Grades 9-12*

**Content Standard 1:** Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Advanced 1: Students initiate, define, and solve challenging visual arts problems independently using intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

**Content Standard 4:** Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Proficient 3: Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making.

**Content Standard 5::** Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and work of others

Proficient 2: Students describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts.

Artsedge link to National Art Standards: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm>

See for standards of lower grades, to which this activity is adaptable.