

# OUT OF THE BAG

## ART EXPLORATION

### HENRY FOX TALBOT + BRAD McMURRAY: HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Henry Fox Talbot, *Open Door*, 1844



Brad McMurray, *Merritt BC*, October 2012

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### INTRODUCTION

Using Henry Fox Talbot's and Brad McMurray's work as a foundation, students are introduced to the history of photography, its contemporary relevance, and will create their own photography-influenced art projects including a **camera obscura**.

### OBJECTIVE

This guide provides information and activity lesson plans to inspire students to learn more about photography through the work of 19th century English photographer Henry Fox Talbot and contemporary Burnaby artist Brad McMurray. The highlighted artworks — both part of Burnaby Art Gallery's Permanent Collection — were created over 150 years apart, but both display some of the essential aspects of photography. Students will learn that though the processes by which Talbot and McMurray created their images is technologically vastly different, some commonalities remain: both are recording an image and both are dealing with components of photography such as composition, framing, lighting and subject matter.

### HISTORY

The origins of photography date back hundreds of years to the camera obscura which was used as a way to study astronomy and optics. Later it was used as a tool by artists to aid in composition for drawing and painting, and in the early 1800's French inventor Nicéphore Niépce created the first photographic image. In both camera obscura and contemporary cameras, light passes through an opening or a lens. In the past this image was captured on a surface to create a negative, which in turn could be developed into a print. Contemporary cameras create a digital record of an image through an electronic sensor, which can be shared through digital media or developed into a print.

### AGE GROUP

Grades 4-7

### PROGRAM LENGTH

120 minutes

### ARTWORKS

1. *Open Door*, Henry Fox Talbot, 1844, printed 1982.
2. *Merritt, BC*, 2012, Brad McMurray, 2012.

### CURRICULAR TIES

- » Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge and perspectives.
- » Artistic expressions differ across time and place.
- » Experiencing art challenges our point of view and expands our understanding of others.
- » Explore identity, place, culture and belonging through arts experiences.
- » Express feelings, ideas and experiences in creative ways.
- » Describe and respond to visual and performing art pieces and provide constructive feedback.
- » Creative expression develops our unique identity and voice.
- » Explore elements, processes, materials and techniques of the arts.

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### ARTIST BIOS

#### Henry Fox Talbot

Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) was a British scientist, inventor and photography pioneer, who invented the salted paper and calotype processes. In 1835, he created the earliest surviving photographic negative, taken of a small window at his home, Lacock Abbey, in Wiltshire, UK. In order to recoup the costs of his research (approximately £5000), he protected his technique with a controversial patent. When the patent expired in 1854 and in the face of much public pressure, he did not renew the patent. Talbot was also a specialist in the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia and, with Sir Henry Rawlinson and Dr. Edward Hincks, was one of the first decipherers of the cuneiform inscriptions of Nineveh.

#### Brad McMurray

Brad McMurray is a Burnaby and Okanagan Valley-based artist whose work has been exhibited at numerous galleries including the Vernon Public Art Gallery and the Penticton Art Gallery. His work is held in private and public collections including the City of Burnaby Permanent Art Collection.

The Burnaby Art Gallery's 2020 exhibition *Brad McMurray: Pedestrian* presents works focusing on the idiosyncratic structures and designs of the urban and peri-urban environment. Looking at Burnaby and beyond, this exhibition explores the complexities of the built environment and our navigation within it, drawing upon a long lineage of photographers working in the "New Topographics" tradition, which focused on often overlooked or **banal** subject matter found in everyday life.

### QUERIES

- » Compare and describe Talbot and McMurray's images. How are they similar or different? Look at colour, texture, **framing** and **composition**.
- » Discuss the subject matter of these images. Are they interesting? Think of some words to describe them: e.g. quiet, bright, intimate, old etc.
- » Describe some of the details in the photos that give the viewer information.
- » What does the composition of the images tell us?

### ART ACTIVITY 1

#### Colour and Value

##### Materials:

White sheets of paper (8.5x11 inches approx.)  
Various papers (shades of black; colour)  
Scissors  
Pencil  
Glue

There are over 150 years between the taking of Talbot's and McMurray's photographs, yet they share some characteristics: subjects are buildings, no people are featured, rectangular shapes define them, and they appear to be taken on sunny days. In this exercise you will look at the arrangements and parts of these two photographs and create your own collage based on their compositions.

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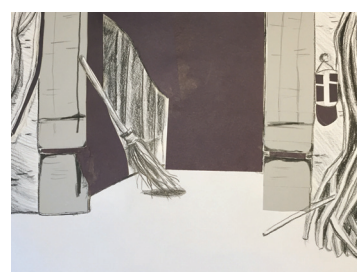
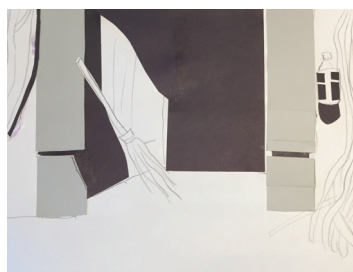
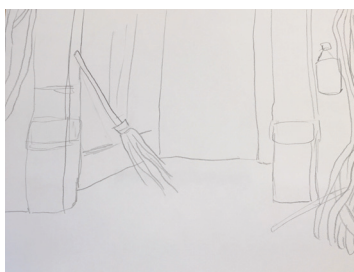
### ART ACTIVITY 1



» Choose one of the images to work with. For Talbot's image notice how many different **values** — the range of lighter and darker areas — there are. As a black and white photo, there is no other colour shown. McMurray's image on the other hand uses intense colour. Depending on the image you chose, pick one of the following exercises:

1. **Talbot:** find a range of different values of black and grey in a variety of papers: construction paper, newspapers, magazines or any other sources without colour. On a separate white sheet of paper, draw in pencil the composition of Talbot's image. Start by looking at the strongest lines, such as the door frame, the broom and the shadows. Looking at Talbot's image, identify five different levels of value, from darkest to lightest. Next identify the darkest, or blackest areas and cut out that shape from the darkest paper you have. Lay it down on the white paper.

Repeat this process with five different values of black and grey until you've built up the image. If there are details (such as the broom handle or vines) that too small to work with, draw them in pencil on a separate piece of paper cut them out. Glue all the pieces down. If various shades of paper aren't available, use marker or crayons to create your own. Your artwork will look different than Talbot's but will give an idea of the values and lightness and darkness captured by the photographer's camera.



2. **McMurray:** find paper sources that are similar colours to those in McMurray's photograph: blue, red, light greens, yellow and greys. On a separate white sheet of paper, draw in pencil the composition of McMurray's image. Start by looking at the strongest lines, such as the roofline, the bottom of the building where it meets the grass, the square shapes on the side of the building. Next start with one colour and cut it out in the shape of one of the parts of the image. For the sky, cut its shape out of blue material and lay it down on the white paper.

Repeat this process with different colours and shapes until you've built up the image. Glue all the pieces down. Your artwork will look different than McMurray's work, but will give an idea of the colour usage and composition captured by the photographer's camera.



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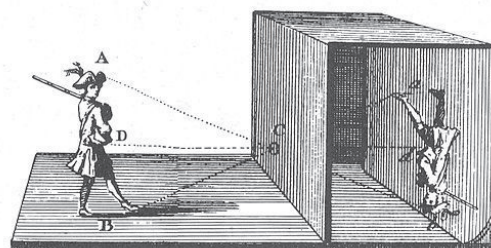
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### ART ACTIVITY 2

#### Camera Obscura

##### Materials:

Pencil or sewing pin  
Shoe box with lid (or similar)  
Xacto knife  
Parchment (or wax) paper  
Tin foil  
Scissors  
Ruler  
Tape (clear and black or duct)  
Cloth



Camera Obscura

Making photographs with a camera is based on light moving through a lens hole into a dark space, or **darkroom**, **exposing** the image on a surface such as a **negative**. Pinhole cameras are based on the **camera obscura** principle where light (and image) pass through a small hole on one side of a box to create an inverted image on the opposite side (see illustration above). It is the same basic principle that cameras today use. This exercise will help you create your own pinhole camera.



- » In the middle of one of the small ends of the box, cut a 1x1 inch opening. In the middle of the opposite end of the box, cut a 5x5 inch hole. The holes should sit across from each other. Have an adult help cut these out with the Xacto knife.
- » Cut a 2x2 inch piece of tin foil and tape it over the smaller hole. Using a sewing pin or sharp tip of a pencil carefully make a small hole in the centre of the tin foil. The hole should be about 1/16 inch across. If the hole is too big, another piece of tinfoil can be used.
- » Cut a 6x6 inch piece of parchment or wax paper and tape it over the larger opening, from the inside the box. This will be the 'screen.'
- » Using black tape or duct tape, tape any holes in the box that might let light in. If needed, tape the top of the box closed to keep light out.
- » In a darkened room, position yourself and the camera facing a bright light source, such as a window or lamp.
- » Using a dark blanket or jacket, cover the end of the camera with the parchment as well as your head. Try to block out all light coming in, as this will interfere with the projected image. Standing about 5 feet away and hold the camera steady.
- » An inverted image will appear on the parchment paper. Note that there will be some variation in focus and lightness in the image. Experiment with different subjects to see how the image varies. However, use caution when moving about and remove the blanket or cloth from your head.

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### TERMS

**Darkroom** A room from which normal light is excluded, used for developing photographs.

**Camera Obscura** A natural optical phenomena, later created through a device such as small box or a room, in which an image passes through an opening or a lens and is projected on a back surface.

**Exposure** Amount of light reaching an electronic image sensor or photographic film.

**Negative** Photographic image, usually on a strip of transparent film, that is recorded with reversed colours and values, when exposed to light.

**Composition** Arrangement into specific proportion or relation and especially into artistic form.

**Framing** The way the image is situated within the photographic frame.

**Value** Relative lightness or darkness of an area in an artwork or image.

**Banal** Lacking in originality to the point of being obvious and boring.

### RESOURCES

*Brad McMurray: Pedestrian*, 2020 Exhibition at Burnaby Art Gallery

*Permanent Collection*, McMurray works - Burnaby Art Gallery

*Biography*, Henry Fox Talbot

*Photography in Canada: 1960-2000*, National Gallery of Canada

*Photography*, Library and Archives Canada

*History of Photography*, PBS

### SHARE

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