

THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS PROCESS AT THE AGO

The **Critical Analysis Process** is a central part of the Ontario arts curriculum. The process helps students develop and express an informed response to an image or work of art – in this case, the photographs of Henryk Ross – using critical thinking skills. In the curriculum, the process has five stages at the elementary level and four stages at the secondary level.

At the AGO, the critical analysis process we use with both elementary- and secondary-level students has three stages: **Description, Analysis and Interpretation** and **Cultural Context**. Our process begins with a description

of the concrete visual information found in the work (**what you see**), moves through a critical analysis based on contextual information provided as needed (**understanding what you see**) and encourages interpretation through personal meaning-making (**what you think about what you see**). Woven throughout these stages is cultural context: the personal, social and historical context of the creator and the work (**what was happening at the time**).

These questions have been adapted for exploring the photographs of Henryk Ross.

Examples of questions by stage:

DESCRIPTION

- What is your first impression?
- What captures your attention?
- How does this photograph make you feel?
- What does this photograph remind you of?
- What puzzles you? What questions do you have?
- What is happening in this photograph?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What clues tell you when and where this photograph was taken?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

- How does this photograph evoke feelings, ideas and images?
- What do you think the theme or subject of the photograph is? Why?
- What message or meaning do you think the photograph communicates?

- What do you think is the purpose of this photograph?
- Has your point of view changed from your initial reaction? How and why?
- How effective are the photographer's choices in communicating his intended message?

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- When and where was the work created? By whom?
- What was happening in society during that time? Socially? Historically? Politically?
- What was happening in Ross's life when the photograph was created?
- Who was the intended audience for the photograph? How has the audience changed?
- Whose voices do we hear? Whose voices do we not hear?