WHO SHOT SPORTS

29.05.2017 – 19.11.2017
Who Shot Sports
A photographic history, from 1843 to the present day

This guide is part of a series of documents intended to help teachers prepare for a class visit to the Olympic Museum. It contains suggested itineraries, as well as a number activities you can do in the exhibition.

You can also take one of our Museum Coaches with you. Our coaches accompany the students throughout their visit, adapting to the age of the students and the needs of the group.

If you want to continue to work on the themes raised by the exhibition, an information sheet, an activity sheet and a video are available online. They contain an overview of sports photography and a series of exercises that can be done in class.

For more information, visit: www.olympic.org/education.

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Individual visit
Visit guided by the teacher, with or without tablets, with suggested routes and activities inside the exhibitions (free of charge, subject to reservation and availability).

Special student price:
ages 6-16 years old CHF 7.- per student / child.
1 accompanying adult obligatory and free of charge per group of 10 students/children.

Coached visit
With or without a workshop, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (last visit):
- Monday to Friday, from May to October
- Tuesday to Friday, from November to April

Min. 15, max. 18 students / children per group, aged 6 and above
Length: 90 minutes
Available in English, French and German
CHF 15.- per student / child, including entry ticket.
1 accompanying adult obligatory and free of charge per group of 10 students / children.

Information and reservations:
edu.museum@olympic.org; +41 21 621 66 85
The visit, step by step

Who Shot Sports

The “Who Shot Sports” exhibition offers an overview of the history of sports photography, through 159 photos from 1843 to the present day. From the first daguerrotypes to digital images, sports photographers have played a crucial role in the development of photography.

The exhibition is structured around nine themes, each of which introduces a different aspect of sports photography. “The beginnings of sports photography” explains the origins of the discipline and presents the first sports photographs, taken at the end of the 19th century. The “Vantage point” and “Decisive moment” chapters are dedicated to two key elements of taking an amazing shot. Four more sections give a panorama of the sports image. Finally, in the “Olympics” section, visitors will discover the intimate links between sports photography and this world media event.

The exhibition is on the first floor of the Olympic Museum. It is organised by the Brooklyn Museum of New York, and produced by Gail Buckland, Benjamin Menschel Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

In parallel with “Who Shot Sports”, three more exhibitions devoted to sports photography provide a panorama of the discipline and illustrate its intimate links with the Olympic Games:

- In the Espace Galerie on Level +2: “Rio 2016 through the lenses of four photographers” shows a selection of images by the official photographers of the Olympic Games Rio 2016.
- In the Art Lounge (Level -1), “Photographers photographed” presents around 40 photos of photographers at the Games, showing what goes on behind the lens.
- In the Olympic Museum Park, a series of historic shots from the IOC’s archives bring previous Olympic summer and winter Games to life.

Educational objectives

- To chart the history of sports photography and understand its influence on the evolution of photographic techniques.
- To discover what it takes to be a sports photographer.
- To observe images of sport and think about the photographers’ intentions.
- To express opinions about sports photographs.
- To explore the main elements of a fixed image (composition, viewpoint, background, etc.)
- To learn the basic vocabulary needed to analyse a photograph.

Links to the school curriculum
Visit plan

Highlights of the exhibition:

• 159 photographs
• 14 slide shows
• 5 freeze-frame videos
• A digital timeline presenting 15 photos that have left a mark on the history of sports photography
1. The Beginnings of Sports Photography

Up to around 1890, the techniques available were not capable of capturing a body in motion. In its earliest days, sports photography consisted mainly of portraits of athletes.

Taking a photograph took a long time, and athletes were obliged to pose for their portraits in a studio. The first known sports photograph, taken by David Hill and Robert Adamson, is of a young man holding a racquet, with a determined look on his face. A metal frame hidden behind his back and leg helped him to hold the pose for several minutes.

The problems connected with capturing athletes in motion and on the field of play encouraged the first sports photographers to experiment and innovate. This is why many photographic inventions are directly connected with the history of sports photography.

Focus: Chronophotography

Chronophotography was a new technique invented at the end of the 19th century with the input of a number of scientists. The technique was perfected in 1882 by Frenchmen Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) and his assistant Georges Demeny (1850-1917). It provides a way of scientifically observing the strength, skill and flexibility of athletes with great precision, by deconstructing the movements made by the body in different phases of movement.

At the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, researchers took the opportunity of the presence of so many athletes to produce a series of impressive images, such as one that captured the American high-jump champion mid-jump. Later, Demeny would set up the first scientific photographic laboratory, and his observations helped to improve athlete training at the time. And that was all thanks to sports photography!

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

- A sports photography timeline (touch screen).
- A slide show of photograph albums from the late 19th century.
- A slide show of chronophotographs by Georges Demeny.

ACTIVITIES

- Find examples of photos taken in a studio and in the field. What are the differences?
- Stage a sports photography shoot. Try posing for a photograph as athletes had to in the 1870s. Pick a "sporty" pose and try to hold it for 4 minutes – it’s harder than it sounds! How long do you pose for a photo these days?
- Choose one photograph from the exhibition and try to place it correctly on the timeline (interactive terminal).
2. Fans and Followers

Sports photography is not just about athletes in action. Photographers also point their lenses at the spectators, and try to capture the range of their emotions.

**INSIDE THE EXHIBITION**
- A shot by the famous war photographer Robert Capa.
- A shot of champion Usain Bolt taking a selfie with fans.
- A photograph by Paolo Pellizzari taken with a 360° panoramic camera.

Photographer Deanne Fitzmaurice captures the fans’ explosion of joy and a passionate kiss in a San Francisco bar. – © Deanne Fitzmaurice
3. Vantage Point

Choosing their viewpoint is one of the ways in which photographers create stunning shots. Although sports photographers are often allocated specific pitches during competitions, they use every ounce of imagination and audacity to find unusual shots.

Photographers choose their vantage points carefully, and change them depending on the sport they are shooting. Thanks to telephoto lenses and new remote control technologies, cameras can now be placed at the heart of the action, enabling the photographers to stay further and further from the field of play.

Whether on the ground, underwater or in the air, there is an infinite choice of possible viewpoints, and photographers make the most of them to create breathtaking images.

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

- A low-angle shot by Bob Martin, of horses coming over a jump, taken with a camera hidden under the obstacle.
- A photo of Europe’s highest football pitch, in Gspon in the Valais.
- An aerial shot by Adam Pretty of two simultaneous wrestling bouts.

Focus: Matthew Dunn by Tim Clayton

To take this photograph, called “Boy in the bubble”, the British photographer chose to place his camera dead ahead of his subject. This is called a frontal viewpoint. This strategy helps to bring the subject and the spectator closer together.

Tim Clayton succeeded in capturing a fleeting instant, the moment when the water stretched into a bubble across the swimmer’s face as he resurfaced after a dive. In order to capture this moment, the photographer prepared carefully, chose the correct location and selected the right equipment.

Other elements in this image are equally important: black and white gives it a timeless appeal and draws attention to the contrasting tones and the reflections of the water. The background is out of focus, drawing attention to the face. Looking closely, it’s possible to see that the swimmer put his goggles on upside-down.

This photograph won the 1993 World Press Photo of the Year in the Sports Singles Category!

ACTIVITIES

- Define the terms high-angle, low-angle and overhead shots. Find an example of each of these viewpoints.
- Think about all the technical requirements for shooting a series of high-angle shots (ladders, drones, fixing the camera to a railing, etc.).
4. The Decisive Moment

The moment the photographer chooses to click the shutter is crucial. The term “decisive moment” refers to a concept pioneered by Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), a famous French photo-journalist. In his opinion, taking a good photograph is not just about choosing the right composition, it’s also about waiting until the right second to capture the photograph.

As photographer Jason Evan says: “I’d love to say that you can plan out, you see the pictogram, and you know that something cool could happen there. And then it’s just a matter of waiting for it, where it happens and what happens...” Being able to spot the potential for a good photo takes practice, but sometimes luck also plays a part. And it’s not always good luck.

In sports photography, the decisive moment isn’t always the moment that a goal is scored, or the finish line is crossed. In the same way, sports photography doesn’t just record victory. It’s also capable of telling stories through images.

Focus: Serena Williams by Bob Martin

In this photograph, taken by Bob Martin at the French Open in 2004, tennis player Serena Williams is frozen mid-action. The image reveals what the spectators’ eyes are incapable of seeing. And yet, the photographer was a long way from the court, back with the TV commentators.

The shot reveals the athlete’s supreme concentration and her contracted muscles, and gives an impression of the speed of the action. Everything is moving so quickly, the tennis ball itself is out of focus. This image is almost like a painting, with its intense colours and different shades of brown. Serena’s shadow is visible on the surface of the clay court.

Advances in digital photography technology since the 1980s have provided the ability to capture ever-more dramatic images, with vivid colours and incredible sharpness. Bob Martin doesn’t hesitate to use photo editing software to enhance certain aspects of his photos, such as contrast and colour intensity. He uses all the tools at his disposal to make his images even more striking.

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

- A slide show of “Six days in Paris” series by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.
- One of the first stroboscopic colour photographs by Harold Edgerton.
- Examples of photographs of extreme sports.

ACTIVITIES

- Choose two images and compare them, exploring the difference in your emotional response.
- Imagine what happened just before, or just after. What is going on off-camera, outside the frame of the image?
5. In and Out of the Ring

Boxing and other combat sports have always fascinated artists and photographers. What could be more appealing to photograph than the brute strength of two bodies grappling for dominance!

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

• A portrait of boxer Rocky Graziano by photographer and director Stanley Kubrick.
• Slide show of images of Mexican lucha libre wrestlers, and the traditional wrestling of South Sudan.

The fight is so intense that it’s impossible to say which hands and feet belong to whom. – © Franck Seguin
6. For the Love of Sport

Sports photographers are driven by a passion for sport, as are their models, the athletes, whether famous or unknown, professional or amateur, young or old. These shots, which were not taken at a major competition, show the universality and intergenerational appeal of sport.

**INSIDE THE EXHIBITION**
- A slide show of five series focusing on amateur sport around the world.
- A shot of an Alzheimer’s patient playing table tennis as part of her therapy, by Lucy Nicholson.
- A shot from the biggest collection of sports photographs taken in Switzerland between 1918 and 1940 by Lothar Jeck.

**ACTIVITIES**
- Define what constitutes a “photographic series” and find some examples in the exhibition.
- Put yourself in the shoes of a sports photographer, and imagine what themes would make a good series. Compile a list of suggestions from the whole group.
- Discuss the documentary and artistic value of these photographs. Do they merely convey information, or has the photographer also thought about the aesthetic appeal?

Professional photographers are not just interested in great champions. They show that anyone can take pleasure from sport. – © Lucy Nicholson/Reuters
7. Behind the Scenes

Sports photographers are sometimes allowed into the changing rooms and training venues, where they can give an insight into what happens behind the scenes. These rather unusual shots give a rare glimpse of the athletes' lives away from the spotlight.

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

- A stroboscopic photograph of a golfer by Harold Edgerton.
- A contemporary chronophotograph by Howard Schatz.
- A slide show from the "In the locker room" series by Michael Zagaris.
8. The Olympic Games

Every four years, sports photographers experience fifteen days of intense competition, just like the athletes, at the Olympic Games. Over these two weeks, competition between accredited photographers is intense, as they vie to have their shots published in newspapers, magazines and on the internet.

It’s a serious business. Photographers bring all their imagination and creativity to bear to produce the best shots. It’s also physically demanding. They have to be quick and agile, and they have to carry a lot of equipment around with them. John Huet, official photographer of the 2016 Games in Rio, says: “I train in the run-up to the Games as you need to be in peak physical and mental condition! Physically, it’s the hardest thing I have to do.”

It is also an opportunity for many photographers to try out the latest new cameras lent to them by major equipment manufacturers. The photographs taken at the Olympic Games provide a panorama of sports photography, and every sport offers different possibilities. At the Olympic Games, photographers are rather spoilt for choice.

Focus: Photographing the first Olympic Games

57 years after its invention, photography was present at the first Olympic Games of the modern era, in Athens in 1896. The competitions were recorded by a few professional photographers as well as amateurs, some of whom were athletes participating in the competitions.

Photography at the Olympic Games has always made the most of cutting-edge technology. This was already the case back in 1896. At that time, the advent of smaller cameras that could be used outdoors, as well as film cameras, made it possible to capture sporting action in real time. On one image it is even possible to spot one of the first portable cameras made by Kodak, which were prized for their ease of use.

These shots, and the fact that they were sent all around the world, made it possible to record the achievements that took place at the Games, even though some of the photos are still slightly out of focus. It’s important to remember that it was not long since it had been impossible to capture movement via photography.

INSIDE THE EXHIBITION

• Photographs from the first Olympic Games: the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens, and the 1924 Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix.
• Aerial shots of various sports (ice hockey, basketball, gymnastics).
• John Dominis’ iconic photo of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, fists raised, on the podium, Mexico ’68.

ACTIVITIES

• Use the timeline terminal to work out what photographic technology was available at the time of the first Games.
• Find the camera on the photo of the Athens 1896 Games taken by Nikolaos Pantzopoulos. Can you see any more cameras hidden in the photographs of the exhibition?
• Explore the “Photographers photographed” exhibition in the Art Lounge on Level -1.
8. The Olympic Games

Focus: Photo finish

Midway between video and photography, the photo-finish camera is a photographic instrument used to separate close competitors. The camera is placed exactly on the finish line of the event, and one of its side-effects is that it deforms body shapes. Athletes end up with elongated legs and huge arms! Photo-finish cameras are incredibly precise, and are capable of spotting when a single toe crosses the finish line.

Before the photo finish was invented, the finish order was established visually by a panel of judges, who did their best to work out the order in which the competitors finished, which wasn’t always very accurate! Beginning in 1932, a photographer was placed on the finish line, and he snapped a photo. Everyone had to wait for the film to be developed before they could be sure who had won.

The first photo-finish camera dates from 1948, when Omega perfected the technology for use at the London Games. It was nicknamed the “Magic Eye”. And the nickname was accurate, in the sense that it helped people to see what the naked eye was incapable of detecting.

Focus: Rio 2016

At each Olympic Games, several hundred photographers are given a special accreditation that grants them special access. Their images make up an invaluable archive that records the history of the Games.

In 2016, four official photographers documented the competitions, as well as what went on behind the scenes. David Burnett, Jason Evans, John Huet and Mine Kasapoglu Pührer spent three weeks running around the city of Rio and all the Olympic venues.

As well as the areas accessible to accredited media, they also had access to training zones, and were able to follow the athletes as they were preparing, as well as at the competition venues, before the spectators arrived. Quite a privilege! The other 1,387 photographers were no doubt pretty envious.

ACTIVITIES

• Where did these photographers take their shots, in which areas and in what locations? Make a list.
• List the shots by the Río 2016 official photographers in this room. Which Olympic Games were they taken at?
• Explore the photos taken by the four official photographers of the Río 2016 Games in the Gallery, on the 2nd floor of the museum. You can meet some of them on 2 and 3 September 2017, when there will be a special weekend on sports photography.
9. Portraits

Another aspect of sports photography is athletes’ portraits. These photographs are completely different from action shots, and reveal a more private side to the athletes. Photographers are not just interested in sports celebrities – they also take pictures of young athletes and amateurs.

While some of these portraits are taken candidly, at the competition venue, many of them are posed in a studio. These are often highly aesthetic photographs, but they can also be very realistic, evoking emotions such as admiration or compassion. A number of famous fashion photographers including Annie Leibovitz and Richard Avedon have produced portraits like this. Their shots have been published in major magazines (Vanity Fair, Life, etc.) and exhibited in galleries and museums.

Focus: Laura Flessell by Gérard Rancinan

This photo is part of a series on Olympic athletes produced for Sports Illustrated. Here, French photographer Gérard Rancinan chose to capture five-time fencing Olympic medallist Laura Flessell.

The composition of this studio portrait has been carefully thought out. The athlete’s position sideways to the camera, and the choice of a wide angle to produce what is called a “full-length” portrait show the tension in her body. Her helmet is at her feet, revealing the concentration on her face. Nothing is left to chance.

The athlete is posing against a carefully designed backdrop. Behind her, a figure is sketched out in white, also ready to jump. This element is a reference to the chronophotographs of Muybridge and Marey. The photographer himself admitted that it was a homage to these 19th-century scientists. The white chalk lines also mirror the rapid movements of the épée Laura Flessell has in her hand. It’s a complete story, in one image!

ACTIVITIES

- List other genres familiar from art history. Are there any other examples in the exhibition?
- Pick a portrait and describe it; work out what sport it is from, when the photo was taken, and describe what you see. Say whether the photograph was posed or not.
- Compare different compositions (full-length, head shot, etc.). What effect do these choices have on the portrait?