

Learn with MoMA



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Step 1 Look closely

1. What is the first thing you notice in the photograph? Why?
2. What do you notice about how the artist photographs the light and dark areas?
3. How do the light and dark areas contribute to the mood and story of the photograph?

Step 2 Learn more

Photographer Ming Smith has said, “I like catching the moment, catching the light, and the way it plays out. I go with my intuition ... it’s about always looking at lines and the quality of the movement. It’s about seeking energy, breath, and light. The image is always moving, even if you’re standing still.”¹

When approaching image-making, Smith considers bodily movement, spatial relations, and light and shadow. This allows her to show the emotive elements of her subjects. Often the photographer uses blurring in order to blend the subject of the photograph with the background.

Smith frequently references plays and jazz music in her photographs. This photograph, *David Murray in the Wings, Padova, Italy*, is of her husband, who was a jazz musician.

Step 3 Activity: Take a photo that captures light and shadows

Materials: camera

1. Spend a day or two noticing lights and shadows in your environment. Think about time of day, different kinds of lighting, and angles that affect these elements.
2. Choose your favorite moment and take a photo. If you want, you can spend a moment to amplify the lighting with artificial light and to adjust the composition before taking the photograph.
3. Reflection: Were you able to capture the light and shadow of the moment in your photograph? What mood does your photograph reflect? What story does your photo tell?

Step 4 Share!

Share your photograph with a friend or classmate, or you can email the photo to us at MoMA: schoolprograms@moma.org.



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Image: Ming Smith. *David Murray in the Wings, Padova, Italy*. 1978. Gelatin silver print (hand-painted). Acquired through the generosity of the Vera Louise Fraser Estate. © 2023 Ming Smith

1. Ming Smith quoted in “A Portrait of the Artist: Ming Smith in Conversation with Janet Hill Talbert,” in *Ming Smith* (New York & Dallas: Aperture & Documentary Arts, 2020), 15