



The more you do, the more you realize there is to do, what a vast object the metropolis is, and how the work of photographing could go on forever.

— Berenice Abbott

NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM

FAMILY GUIDE: A CLOSER LOOK AT...

BERENICE ABBOTT: CHANGING NEW YORK

NEW YORK METROPOLIS HALL



South and de Peyster Street
Manhattan

NYS
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GUIDE

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Seventh Avenue



Roast Corn Man



Manhattan Skyline South Street



Union Square

Words to know when looking at Berenice Abbott's photographs

Foreground – The part of a view that is nearest to the observer.

Background – The area or scenery behind the main object.

Image – A visual representation of something.

Composition – A whole made up of multiple parts arranged in such a way that the relationships between the parts work together to create a particular effect or meaning.

Façade – Any public-facing side of a building, often featuring decorative elements.

In 1929, after eight years in Europe, photographer Berenice Abbott (1898–1991) returned to New York City for what was planned as a short visit. During her time away, hundreds of nineteenth-century buildings in New York had been demolished to make way for dozens of skyscrapers.

Inspired by the city's dramatic transformation, Abbott wanted to capture this momentous change in photographs. By 1940 she had completed "Changing New York," a monumental achievement of twentieth-century photography.

DID YOU KNOW? Thinking about Façades

Façade is a French term, thought to have come from the Latin word *facia*, meaning "face."

What shapes do you see in the façades of the buildings? Do you think these details would be as noticeable if the photos were in color? Can you compare the façades from different pictures? How do the façades look when they are in the foreground versus the background?

After visiting *Berenice Abbott: Changing New York*, explore *Skyscraper City* to learn more about New York City's fanciful façades.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT... At the Museum

Spend a few minutes looking closely at the collection of photographs.

- Choose a photograph and think about what you see. Why did you choose this image? How would you describe it?
- Imagine you are there in the scene. What do you hear, see, and smell?
- What do you imagine happened moments before or after this photograph was taken? What in the image made you think that?
- Find a photograph in which skyscrapers are in the background. What is in the foreground? Why do you think the photographer included this in the composition?
- Do you think Berenice Abbott was able to show change or transformation in these photographs? If so, describe where you see this.

At Home

Explore your own neighborhood, and take or draw pictures of architecture or the changing landscape. Think about your composition. Will you include something of a different size or shape in the foreground or background to contrast your subject? If you're using a camera, try using a black-and-white filter.

To see more of the *Berenice Abbott: Changing New York* series in the Museum's collection and to learn more about the artist, visit the Museum's Online Exhibitions page on our website, www.nysm.nysed.gov.