

Claire

Partial Draft Critical Review of Alex Prager, *Crowd #2 (Emma)*

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*Alex Prager, Crowd #2 (Emma), 2012, Archival pigment print, 36 x 49 1/2 in. (91.4 x 125.7 cm), The source of the photograph: Phillips (the website that have auctioned this artwork)<sup>(1)</sup>*

## Personal Reaction to this artwork

- Strangeness & Loneliness– Even though there is a huge crowd, still everyone in this artwork looks unfamiliar to each other.
- Uneasy & Suspense – Because of the unexpected and strange angle, and because it seems like a private moment for everyone in this artwork.
- Dramatic – Everyone seems like they are pretending to do one thing, but everyone is doing a different thing. Also, the light, colors, women's make-ups, and wigs look dramatic.
- Anxiety – Their emotions, gestures, and movements express a sense of anxiety.
- Timeless – People in this photograph are in different stages of our life, some of them are young, some are old, some are in the middle.

## Description



- It seems like there are more than 20 people in this photograph.
- Only two women show their faces directly and completely to the viewer.
- The main color tone is one set of complementary color. (Red Orange & Blue)
- Most of the women figures disguised in wigs, and dramatic makeup.
- Since the photographer used high angled view, the depth of space is not clear, and the photograph seems like taken in an unexpected time and place.
- It seems like no one noticed there is a camera above them.
- The light source is above the crowd.
- This photograph was taken in a public space since we can see the concrete road at the lower right part of this artwork. (informs us the location of the artwork)
- Everyone is looking at different spots, doing different things, and they look differently (different ages).

# Formal Analysis



- Low Abstract – High contrast on its saturation of hue; wigs; dramatic make-up
- Less unity, strong variety – Characters' positions; the angles they are looking at; look differently; doing different things.
- Informal balance – Equal visual importance on both side; the artist occupied all the space in this photograph.
- There is no negative space except the little spot of concrete road.(location)
- Everyone is the focus, but the woman in the middle is the major focus since she is the brightest and we can see her face completely.
- Everyone occupy equal space since they crowded together.
- People are biomorphic and their clothing is geometric.
- The crowd is moving since the photograph seems like taken at an unexpected time, and everyone is doing different things.

## Research notes

- Alex Prager (American, born 1979), she is a self-taught photographer, the major features for her photographs are the “boldly colored, shot from unexpected angles, and dramatically lit—feature women disguised in wigs, dramatic makeup, and retro attire.” – MoMA ‘New Photography 2010 Alex Prager’ (2)
- ‘Face in the crowd’ is Prager’s most complex and famous series. It is large-scale photographs of crowd (tens or hundreds of people) gathered together in public spaces “such as an airport terminal, lobby, beach, and movie theatre.”
- “Blurring the line between fiction and reality, ” The actions of every actors in the photograph were directed by Prager. And due to the high angle of views, the artwork narratives the ‘fear, and the desire for basic human interaction and personal safety’.
- ‘Densely detailed and shot from seemingly impossible vantage points, these scenes enact psychological narratives of private and public revelation, repulsion, fear, and the desire for basic human interaction and personal safety.’ – Corcoran ‘Alex Prager: Face in the Crowd’ (3)
- “This work showcases the anxiety of being swept up by the masses while trying to create and maintain a sense of self--conditions long present in the physical world--amplified in the virtual spaces we inhabit today.” Both the fear of crowd and the desire to stand out among them. – Americanart.si.edu ‘Face in the Crowd’ (4)
- Alex Prager had a fear of crowd, and photography is the tool that she used to fight with her anxiety emotion. “Almost as a way to overcome or confront the fear.” By showing every actor’s private moments (in motion and directed), “there is an almost overwhelming awareness of the dramas of each individual and of the situational drama of the group as a whole.”“No one is aware of what the other is going through, and yet everyone is aware that there is this larger thing going on,” Prager says of her characters.
- Prager thought there are some similarities between her photographs and social media.
- “In her previous work, Prager has drawn largely from the aesthetics of the fifties and sixties, partly due to her fondness for the films of those eras.” – Vogue ‘Alex Prager on Her New Exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art’ (5)

## Critical Hypothesis

The artist is interested in the aesthetic of the fifties, and the psychology between crowds and individuals. The photograph expresses the feeling of anxiety from the crowd, and the desire from an individual who wants to stand out from the crowd; and it also expresses the similarities between this dramatic artwork and dramatic social media.

## Supports

- Prager is fascinated for the films during the fifties and sixties, due to this, the style of her photograph is similar to the style during that era. We can see this from '*Crowd #2 Emma*', some women figures wear wigs and dramatic makeup, and style of their clothing was also popular during fifties.
- Prager is also interested in the psychology between crowds and individuals. Since the photograph was taken in public space, and once during her MoMA show Prager realized she had a fear of crowds and photography is the tool that she used to fight with her anxiety emotion.

# Supports

- Prager occupied everywhere in the artwork, the scene expresses the feelings of desire, fear and anxiety from individuals to public. Prager chose the high angle view for this picture, usually high angle view can highlight the environment, let the environment devour the character, and make them look petty and low. Also the color style is in high contrast, and the style of high contrast is sometime used for some tragedy story. These techniques helped to express the anxiety emotion from the crowds.
- It expresses the desire from an individual who wants to stand out from the crowd. The major focus for this artwork is the women who standing in the middle and showing her whole face to the camera. And she seems like the lightest point in this artwork.
- Prager found out the similarities between this photograph and social media, they are all dramatic. The picture was taken in an unexpected time, no one really noticed there is a camera above their heads. And every characters' emotions, make-up, clothing, gestures and movements were all directed by Prager, and everything is fake and dramatic. It is similar to nowadays' dramatic social media, since all their job is to attract people's attention, therefore sometime they will magnify the truth or even make up some stories.



## Different Interpretations by Different Audiences

- Americans during the 50s & 60s – They might think it is a feminist and racist artwork, which promotes equal rights for every individual in the crowd.
- Young children – They might consider it is a common shot on a monitor screen.
- Modern Chinese – The photograph reflects the population problems (ageing population, overloaded population) in nowadays China.
- Stylish young people – It is an advertisement for either a well-known clothing brand, a wig shop or a cosmetic store.

## Preliminary Considerations of Practical Application

Here are my major considerations of practical application after I create one critical hypothesis for 'The Crowd #2'. The major considerations are about conceptual, the use of angle, and the use of color and light.

### Conceptual

While thinking of the anxiety feeling from every individuals in the crowd, it lets me start to consider about the differences on people's personality when they are in the real world and compare to the fake(internet) world. When I was taking the metro every morning to school, I can feel the anxiety emotion from the crowd and from me, too. Most of people pay more attention on their electronic devices, and ignore or dislike people around them, but they are energetic and happy to chat with strangers in their fake world, it might because there is no consequences in that world. Overall, 'The Crowd #2' from Alex Prager let me thinking about the variety among people in their fake world.

### The use of angle: high angle view

Alex Prager use the high angle view for the photograph and in order express the feeling of anxiety and low from the crowds. It makes me curious about the different meaning and feeling that can be express when we are using different perspective of angles. And I would like try to use these angle views, such as bird-eye view, eye-level view, oblique angle view, and low angle view.

### The use of color and light: High contrast

We can see the use of high contrast in 'The Crowd #2', high contrast can express some sort of serious feeling, it also can highlight the subject meaning. The use of different level of colors and lights have different meaning too. If my subject is romantic, then I can try to use bright colors or warm colors.

## Source citation

- (1): <https://www.phillips.com/detail/ALEX-PRAGER/NY040115/273>
- (2): <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/newphotography/alex-prager/>
- (3): <https://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/alex-prager-face-crowd>
- (4): <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/face-crowd-110667>
- (5): <https://www.vogue.com/article/profile-art-photographer-alex-prager-new-exhibition-face-in-the-crowd-at-the-corcoran-gallery-of-art>