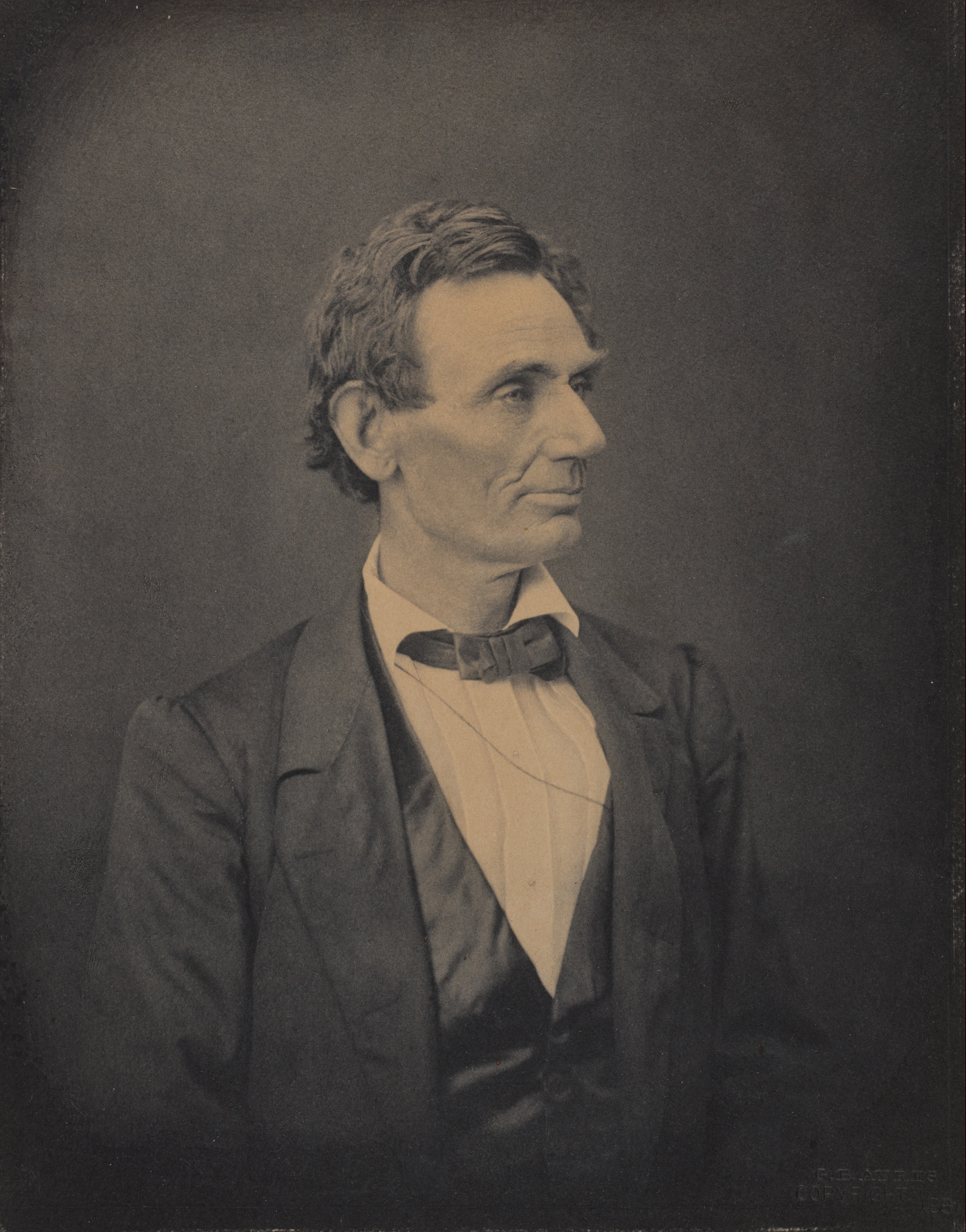
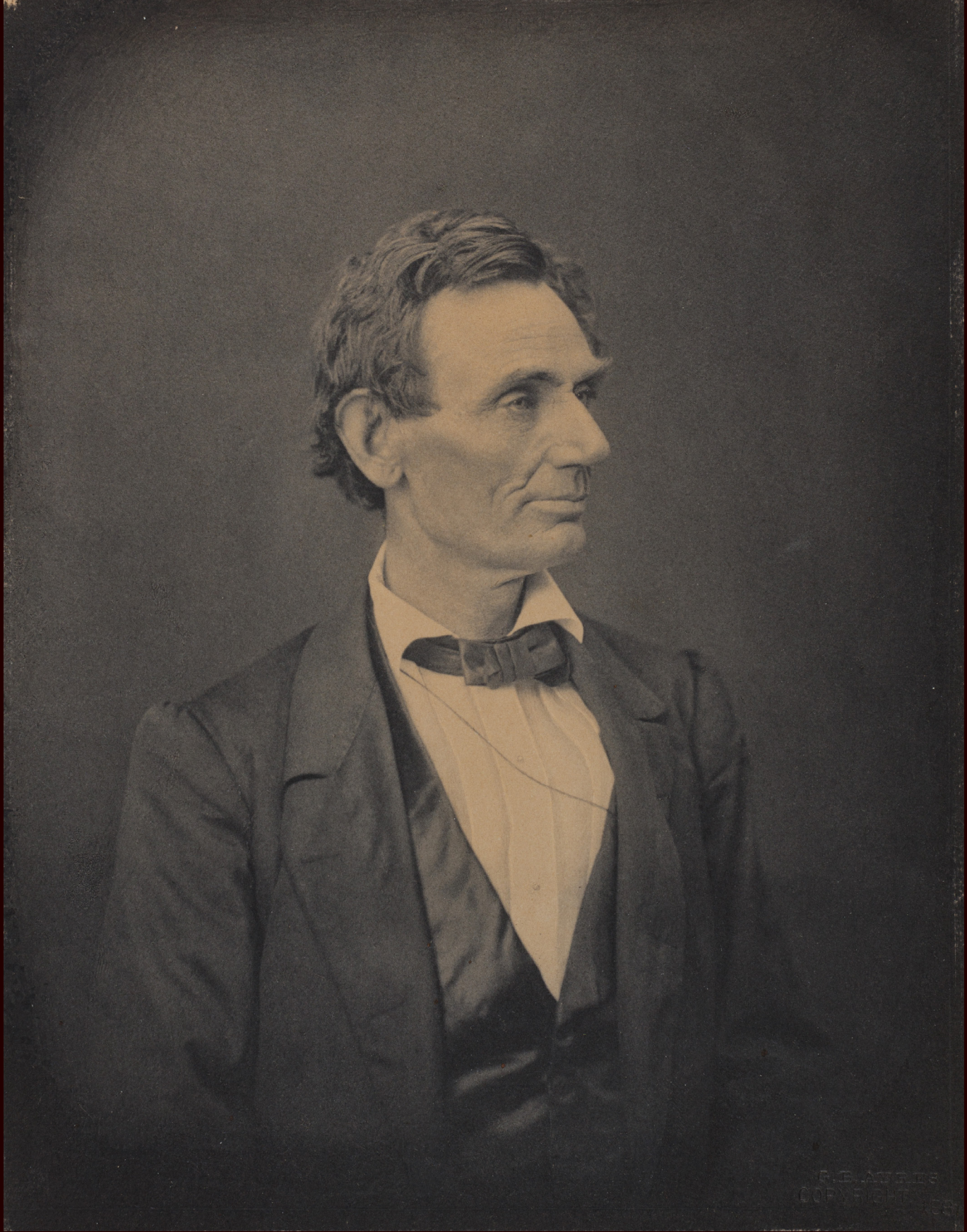


TAKE A LOOK



Alexander Hesler (American, born Canada, 1823-1895)
Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, 1860,
printed 1881 by George B. Ayres
Platinum print
Gift of Baroness Jeane von Oppenheim, 98.254

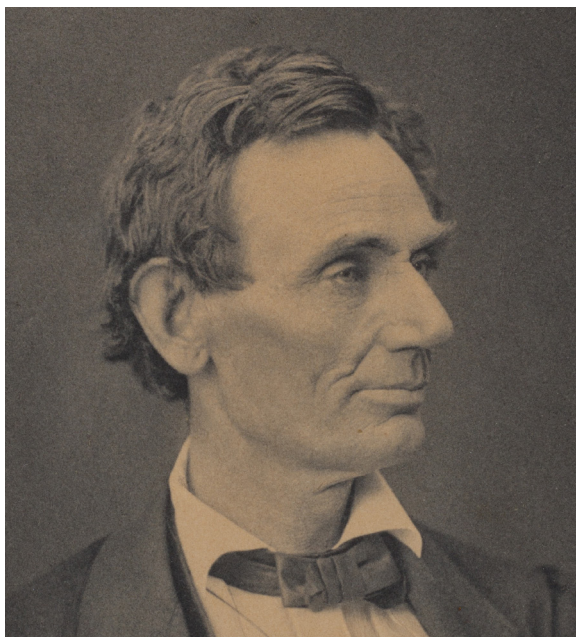


NORTON
MUSEUM
OF ART

A CLOSER LOOK
PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION

Alexander Hesler
Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, 1860

ABOUT



"There is a peculiar curve of the lower lip, the lone mole on the right cheek, and a pose of the head so essentially Lincolnian; no other artist has ever caught it."

WILLIAM H. HERNDON

The Artwork

Alexander Hesler photographed Abraham Lincoln on June 3, 1860. During that sitting, Hesler took three different photographs of the future president, each from slightly different angles. In the photograph in the Norton's collection, Lincoln is framed in the center of the image as he turns to look to his left. Light illuminates his prominent forehead, face, and white shirt. These lighter areas, in contrast to the grey tones of the background and Lincoln's suit, focus the viewer's attention on Lincoln's thoughtful gaze and calm expression. These characteristics would have been important to many voters in the turbulent years before the Civil War. In addition, the camera's sharp focus articulates Lincoln's strong features, including his prominent nose, ear, and deep set eyes, providing a memorable image of a man whom many Americans were just getting to know. Lincoln expressed satisfaction with Hesler's photograph, saying: "That looks better and expresses me better than any I have ever seen; if it pleases the people I am satisfied."

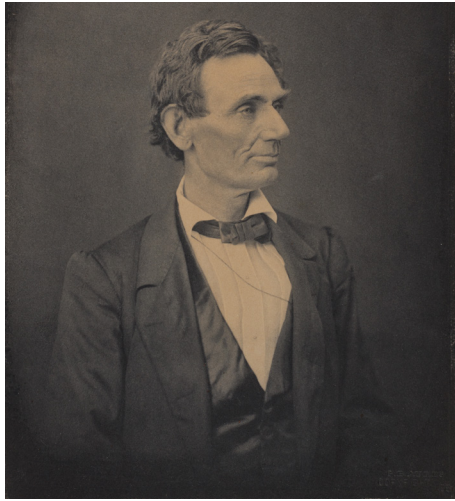
This photograph was taken just two weeks after Lincoln was nominated to be the Republican candidate for President in the 1860 election. Many were surprised that Lincoln, then a U.S. Representative from Illinois, defeated Senator William H. Seward of New York for the nomination. The use of photography to promote a political candidate was still a new idea in 1860 and Lincoln is considered the first candidate to use photography to his advantage. Hesler's images were reproduced by the thousands and pinned to campaign ribbons worn by Republican supporters.

The Artist

Alexander Hesler was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1823 and died in Evanston, Illinois, in 1895. He worked as a photographer during the 1850s and 1860s when photography was still relatively new. Hesler's portrait photography was very popular and essential to his livelihood, but he also gained a reputation for documenting landscapes in the American mid-West. In the 1800s, photographing the wilderness was a difficult task, requiring the use of a portable darkroom. One of Hesler's photographs of a Minnesota waterfall was given to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, inspiring the poet as he wrote "The Song of Hiawatha." For another project, Hesler climbed to the cupola of the Chicago Court House to create 11 images that provided a panorama of the city. After the devastating Chicago Fire of 1871, these became an important historical record of the city. Hesler's most famous images are his portraits of Abraham Lincoln.

Alexander Hesler (American, born Canada, 1823-1895)
Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, 1860, printed by G.B. Ayres 1881 (detail)
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SEE



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Graciela Iturbide (Mexican, born 1942)
Nuestra Señora des las Iguanas, Juchitán, México, 1979
 Gelatin silver photograph
 Purchase, acquired through the generosity of the
 Photography Committee of the Norton Museum of Art, 2010.1

THINK

Observe & Describe

Ask students to look closer by observing the shapes, colors, textures in the photograph. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

Examine the Composition

- What is the first thing you notice about the photograph?
- Describe how people and objects are placed in the photograph.
- What do you notice about the background and foreground?

Examine the Subject

- Make a list of descriptive words that describe Lincoln's expression.
- Can props, hair, make-up, jewelry, background and clothing help us know more about the subject? Explain.
- How important is it that you know who the person is in the portrait?

Examine the Lighting

- Where does the light in the image come from to illuminate Lincoln? Does it come from more than one source?
- Does the light seem natural/artificial/subtle/dramatic? Explain why.
- What does the type of lighting tell us about this portrait?

Examine the Mood

- What mood/feeling does this image portray? Why?
- What do you think is the theme of this portrait?

A Contemporary Approach

Graciela Iturbide

Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide, born in Mexico City in 1942, is known for her black-and-white images of local people. Her photographs reveal the daily lives and costumes of her native country.

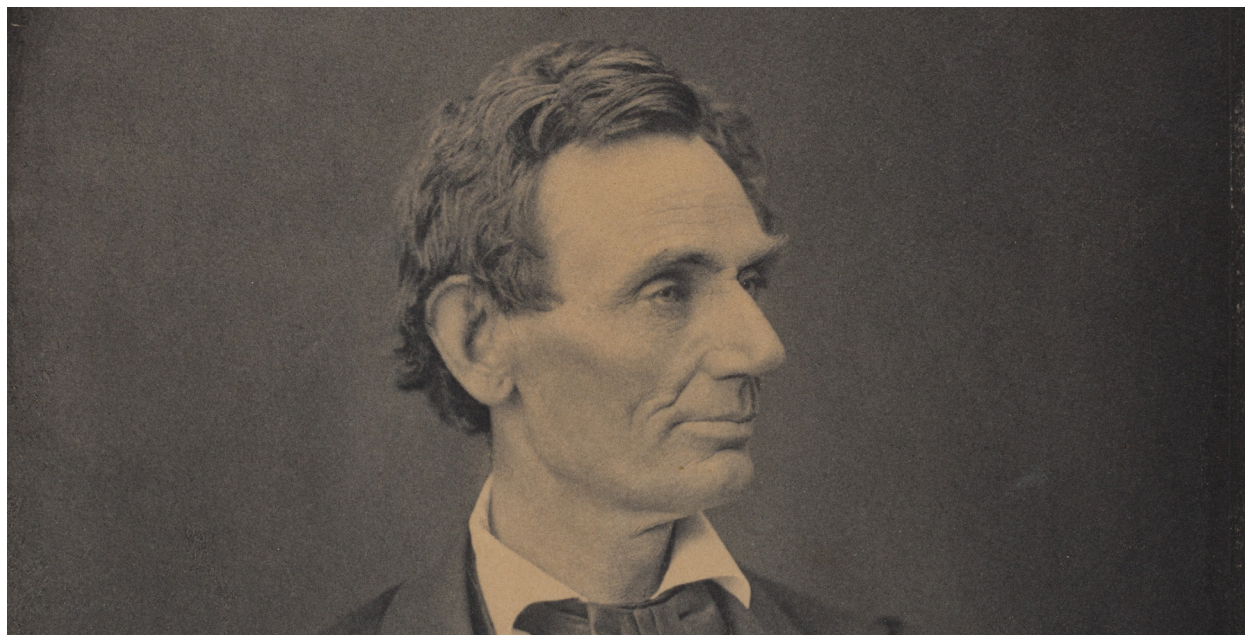
Iturbide spent time documenting Mexican indigenous cultures in the town of Juchitán in Oaxaca, Mexico. Iturbide mainly photographed the community's marketplace and scenes of domestic life, detailing her culture with honesty and a deep understating of its customs.

Let's Compare

Have students look carefully at both photographs, and compare Alexander Hesler's portrait of Abraham Lincoln to Graciela Iturbide's *Nuestra Señora de las Iguanas, Juchitán, México*

What do students notice as they view both photographs? Observe the details in each image. Have students think about the following questions:

- How are these two photographs different?
- How are they the same?
- What interests you about each of these artworks? What makes you say that?
- What do you think these artists were trying to communicate through their work?
- What personal meaning might these photographs have for you? Do they have an important message you could relate to the world today?



For Younger Students

Engage students in discussion and writing activities.

Classroom Activity

Ask students to write 10 words describing the person in the photograph. Ask students to consider composition, subject, lighting, and mood. Share with the class.

- *Do you have any family photos that mean something special to you? Why?*
- *If you were the subject of a portrait photograph, how would you choose to present yourself? Consider your clothes, jewelry, hairstyle, pose, whether you would be alone or with others, any scenery or furniture. Write two paragraphs describing the image.*

For Older Students

Engage in discussion and writing activities.

Topics to Discuss or Write About

The use of photography to promote a political candidate was a relatively new idea in 1860.

Have students answer the following questions:

- *Do you think this image helped Abraham Lincoln get elected? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think Lincoln took advantage of photography to further his political career? Please explain.*
- *Do you think the distribution of photographic portraits influenced voters back then? How?*
- *How do political campaigns today use photography and portraits of candidates to their advantage? Can you provide an example from today's political campaigns?*

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