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Teaching Philosophy

When photography was first invented, many people thought it was magic. The French photographer Gaspard Felix Tournachon feared that being photographed might take something away from him, as the image had to be removed from somewhere. Even today, this thought is shared by some indigenous populations, who perhaps are not wrong in a philosophical sense- though this discussion is still continuing. When I teach, my students experience part of photography's magic, they consider the meaning of the medium, and are encouraged by their personal discoveries.

Today, cameras are tools that are not often questioned, yet I wonder how many can explain their inner mechanism. Most who have worked in a darkroom remember the moment they first placed paper in developer and an image appeared. Jules Janin, one of photography's earliest practitioners, expressed it as : "God said: 'let there be light', and it was light. Now we can tell the towers of Notre-Dame 'be an image', and the towers follow." To add to the magic, in photography, many things happen by chance. The use of mercury for daguerreotype development was discovered by accident, and its workings are still not fully explained. With this lineage, students learn that major breakthroughs can happen unexpectedly, and by continuing to experiment, wonderful things occur.

The East German theorist Friedrich Herneck stated that the photographer "paints directly with his eyes". Teaching photography at the introductory level, I familiarize students with observing differences in light and shadow, and noticing variations in tone. One can look back at the pictures from one's first photography class and see the beginnings of a personal language. Though it can't be denied that a technical apparatus is essential to create a photograph, more invasive than a brush, students must develop awareness of their personal vision. Critique sessions are an effective method to achieve this, where one learns to decode images, and become conscious of choices. Even technical assignments can lay bare style. A task requiring students to photograph their personal surroundings while noting aperture settings, is revealing beyond depth of field. Another task titled "Come Closer", even more so.

Working with analogue photography, especially old techniques such as palladiums and daguerreotypes, was essential in my own understanding of photography's ontology. Now that photography is widely spread, where many people use it daily, students benefit from an inquiry into the foundations upon which they're working. A historical framework helps students understand today's image scenario, and to discuss their work with clarity. To develop the student's awareness of their field, I introduce photographers who represent developments in the medium. As the course advances and I understand each student's interests, I suggest artists that are relevant to each individual's practice.

I teach by attending to individuals, while remaining conscious of the dynamics of the group. I liken this to a conductor in an orchestra. A teacher should be aware of the mood in class and have the ability to change it, to feel each individual, and ensure each person's ideas are heard. To grow as an artist one must find one's individual way. Though it sounds romantic, it requires uninterrupted effort over a long period, and the encouragement of a teacher can be invaluable. After presenting my final project to my first photography professor at my university, he asked me to "promise that you will continue working with photography". Most likely he does not even imagine how often this encouragement is on my mind, especially when I need it most.

Managing a class involves working with its rhythms. I schedule the curriculum so that students leave the class at a high point, feeling they have spent their time productively, inspired to return to the darkroom and try a particular experiment, and eager to create new work. One example I use to achieve this could be to end the class by together looking at the homework for next week. Brainstorming ideas as a group gets people motivated. My course structure is responsive, so when students show a particular interest, I can harness it for the class's objectives. Students learn best when they are interested, and a good teacher is comfortable with the uncertainty this implies. The teacher guides students to organize their workflow, thoughts and ideas, and teaches them to work with systems.

To encourage participation, especially at the introductory level, I use a method that I encountered during my graduate studies. During a painting class, whenever the professor posed a question to the group, he would name a student to give an answer. That way, everyone participated and was alert, and although it sounds controlled, the method created an open and inclusive critique environment.

There is no universal formula for the perfect teacher. In the same way as for an artist, each has an individual way. Students likewise have various strengths and weaknesses, and speeds and ways of learning. It is therefore best to use correspondingly various inputs. This includes films, presentations, visiting artists, or museum visits, and library or online research. It can also mean researching artists, reading poems, taking field trips, and considering other mediums, to be sure each student's learning style is addressed.

My motivation for teaching is derived from the teacher-student exchange. Teaching is the perfect place to be surrounded by fresh thinking, and experience the way others perceive the world. The classroom provides a forum to test my research, and working where ideas are generated is stimulating for my own practice. Students' questions cause me to rethink assumptions, and the curriculum requires me to be current with the latest movements. In return, students gain insight toward a professional practice. Being an artist, like in other jobs, one has to be methodical; go to the studio, sit at the desk, or pick up a camera. As Chuck Close said, "inspiration is for amateurs", work has to be continuous, and then success, even magic, is bound to occur.



Antique and Alternative Photographic Techniques (proposed class)

Let there be light, and there was light

Svetlana Bailey

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February 18 - May 27

Friday 1:10 - 6.10pm

3 Credits

approx. \$200.00 material cost

strong foundation in photography required; open to undergraduate and graduate students

In the evolution of photography many things happened by magic. The use of mercury for daguerreotypes was discovered by chance, and its workings are still not fully explained. In this course we'll experience how major breakthroughs appear unexpectedly, and by continuing to experiment, wonderful things occur.

This course is a journey into photography's origins. Through hands-on experiments we'll rediscover the cyanotype, Van Dyke brown, palladium and the daguerreotype. We'll take field trips, observe the sunlight together and shoot, and we'll discuss how we can use antique processes meaningfully. Digital cameras and negatives will have a role, and we'll consider the relevance of Instagram filters, and the old "real" photograph in the contemporary image context.

Weekly assignments will teach mastery of the processes. At the end of the semester students submit a major body of work using a technique of their choice, reflecting their understanding and skill in the medium. Individual attention will be given, where we can explore techniques in relation to the student's studio practice.

This course is especially suited for people with a love of light and no fear of the dark. Open-minded and experimental participants are encouraged to look deeper into occurrences, and not be afraid of contradiction. Students can be non majors, though are required to have basic experience in b&w darkroom printing and processing, along with some type of image making apparatus (digital, analogue, mobile phone, pinhole etc).

Global Image Scenario (proposed class)

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February 18 - May 27
Friday 1:10 - 6.10pm
3 Credits
approx. \$150.00 material cost
strong foundation in photography required; open to undergraduate and graduate students*

Images surround us daily in most areas of our lives. We believe in them, regarding them as windows that allow us to look at the world and comprehend it. In doing so, we easily forget that the images are mediated, and instead of information they become manipulation- an echo chamber of ideas.

What if we start collecting all these images, creating a global family album? Could we use them to navigate, or would their confusion deceive us? Could they be photographed, seen as art, and hung in a gallery? In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* Vilém Flusser proposes that images are supposed to be maps but we fail to decode them, and they become screens. Flusser says we idolize images, so their role reverses and they shape our reality, forming what he terms a “global image scenario”, moving from imagination to hallucination.

Through weekly assignment’s we’ll perform photographic brainstorming, taking, organizing and decoding images in turn from family albums, high and low art, advertising, community art, journalism, activism, propaganda and our personal surroundings. The class will conclude with a group exhibition at the Red Eye Gallery, where we’ll curate a “global image scenario” with the work of the participants.

The course is for photography majors or non majors with a solid foundation in photography, and for people with a strong interest in images, who question photography, and wish to create and curate work in a group environment.

Introduction to B&W Analogue Photography (taught at RISD)
Painting with One's Eyes

Svetlana Bailey
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Wintersession (Schedule A), January 6 - February 9 (5 Weeks)
Every Monday and Tuesday plus two Wednesdays (01.13 and 01.27) 1:10-6:10pm
Design Center Room 417
3 Credits
\$100.00 lab fee and approx. \$200.00 material cost
No pre-requisites; open to undergraduate and graduate students

East German theorist Friedrich Herneck stated that the photographer “paints directly with his eyes”. In this course, students will use black and white photography to develop their vision. Beginning with observation of one’s surroundings, the direction of light, shapes, shadows and tones, students practice connecting their vision and imagination with a camera.

Most who have worked in a darkroom remember the moment they first placed paper in developer and an image appeared. In analogue photography, learning is haptic; one opens the camera and sees its inner mechanism, working directly with the film. We will discuss American and international artists who have worked with the medium, including Sally Mann, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Alexander Rodchenko, Bernd and Hilla Becher and others, and each student will give a 10 minute presentation on an artist of their choice. We’ll review briefly the origins of photography, and visit the RISD museum to compare and contrast original prints.

This course is aimed at students without prior experience of analogue photography. Students will master the 35mm camera, light metering, processing film, reading negatives, printing contact sheets, and producing photograms. Shooting one roll of film each day for five weeks, students will learn to decode their images through critique sessions. A final body of work of 10-12 images will be based on a theme of the student’s choice. Personal vision in photography forms early, and we’ll see the emergence of each student’s visual language.



Syllabus

Introduction to B&W Analogue Photography

Goals

technical

To master the 35mm camera: load film, focus, understand aperture, exposure, ISO.
To develop b&w film and produce high quality darkroom prints.

critical

To develop a personal vision and acquire skills to produce a cohesive body of work.
To understand one's work in a critical context.
To learn the tools to constructively decode the photographs of others.

historical

To understand the origins of the medium.
To develop awareness of the field and its evolution.

Objectives

The demonstrations and assignments begin with the fundamentals of operating a camera and darkroom printing, and progress in complexity as the course develops. Each assignment builds upon its predecessors. While learning manual camera operations and the effect of each camera control, the assignment themes are very open to interpretation, encouraging experimentation. Midway through the course the assignments shift to themes that help students think about content and its relationship to technique and expression. Later in the course the themes become personal and narrower, adding complexity and requiring students to think abstractly and about the limits and the possibilities of the medium. The final assignment is completely open and students pursue freely their thoughts and ideas developed during the course.

Technical comprehension of camera and darkroom techniques and application of the effect of each control. 50%

Accumulation and progressive ambition in assignments leading to development of conceptually directed body of photographs. 30%

A presentation or slideshow on a chosen national or international photographer and statement of how this person has influenced your vision. 10%

Contribution to critiques, through questioning, commenting, suggesting and participating in the discussion of peer work, demonstrating a knowledge of technical and conceptual principles. 10%

Grading

Final project 10-12 prints 40%
10 assignments (5% each) 50%
Photographer presentation 10%

A

Complete understanding of camera use and darkroom skills, able to produce high quality prints and employ technical skills to convey meaning. Chooses thoughtful and original projects and pursues them successfully. Applies a refined understanding of critical themes, and uses insight and reflection to make valuable contributions to critiques of peers. Presentations and submissions are made on time, with thorough consideration to visual and verbal presentation.

B

Clear understanding of technical skills, can comfortably control all manual aspects of the camera and darkroom skills are sufficient to produce well balanced prints. Regular participation in critique, engages with peers' work and responds to suggestions. Thorough completion of assignments with attention to presentation, and timely submission of work.

C

Demonstrated incomplete understanding of skills, able to produce prints however quality is not always satisfactory. Some contribution to critique, homework assignments incomplete, with little consideration to presentation, and late submission of work.

D

Minimal effort in all areas. Some learning has occurred and is able to perform basic camera and printing operations, however lacks skill and knowledge. Contribution to critique is seldom, and shows little to no development of work from the suggestion of peers. Assignments incomplete or not submitted.

F

Failed to meet the minimum requirements. Cannot operate a camera or produce darkroom prints. Unoriginal or incoherent ideas for projects. Does not respond productively to criticism and is unable to contribute any insights about peers' work. Makes minimal effort in presentation of work.

Methods

Constructive and insightful weekly peer critiques.

One on one instructor reviews, inquiry and suggestions.

Exploring the field: visit the RISD museum, the RISD library special collections, view slideshow presentation of selected artists and watch videos on how photography can be done with very basic equipment.

Demonstrations and assistance with various cameras and darkroom printing techniques.

Presentation of alternative photographic techniques and printing processes.

Assignments begin free and experimental and encourage control over the camera. Later assignments become conceptual, focusing on research and investigation. Final assignment is self directed.

Critique Criteria

Participation in critique is assessed beyond the frequency of contributions, namely; thoughtfulness and a demonstrated effort to understand the work of one's peers leading to genuine and constructive responses, being thoroughly prepared when presenting one's own work, and able to engage with class feedback and draw intelligent conclusions.

Class expectations

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and ready to commence. Work for the day's critique should be hung immediately upon arrival, and discussion will commence at 13.15, unless otherwise instructed. If one has to miss a class, permission from the instructor is required in advance. In case of sickness, the instructor should be informed immediately and supplied with a doctor's certificate. Late arrivals should inform the instructor as soon as practicable. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in a drop of a grade (e.g. B to B-). Grade will be reduced by one level for each class missed without approval. The darkroom needs to be used with care and respect for others. One needs to always make sure to leave the darkroom as found, clean, orderly and to report any problems immediately.

Equipment

35mm manual camera with at least one lens
minimum of 25 films (most likely more)
at least 50 sheets of RC paper (8"x10")
acid free plastic sheets for negatives
binder to store negatives
acid free box to carry prints (8"x10")

Sources

photo supplies and equipment: <http://www.bhphotovideo.com>
used cameras: <https://www.keh.com>
local camera repairs: <http://www.zackscamerarepair.biz>

week 1 Mon

Conversation

Introduction to the course and getting to know each other; discussing requirements and expectations; looking at the goals and objectives; discussing structure of the course and the end of semester assignment; checking cameras, other equipment and supplies.

Demonstration

Demonstration of small format camera; loading film, exposing a negative, use of internal light meter, ISO, focusing, overview of f stop and exposure timing. We'll buy a roll of film, shoot, and develop it. Finishing with a short film "How to use an Afghan box camera"

Assignment

Shoot and develop one film, bring B&W printing paper to class, pick up your kit from the cage. Read: Henry Horenstein, Chaps. 1 and 2, Black and White Photography: A Basic Manual

week 1 Tue

Critique/Conversation

A group critique of the exposed and developed film from the previous day, and the students' assignments. A detailed explanation of aperture and exposure timing (lens, shutter and film exposure), a review of the reading and a mini quiz.

Demonstration

Printing contact sheets from the two films developed in class.

Introduction to the work of photographic artists, after which students will choose one of the following to research and present a slideshow later in the course: Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lee Friedlander, Eugene Atget, Garry Winogrand, Walker Evans, Henry Cartier Bresson, Alexander Rodchenko, Sally Mann, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Rong Rong and Inri, Adam Fuss, Daido Moriyama, Robert and Shana Parke Harrison, Scot Southern

Assignment

Shoot and develop one film and print contact sheet, be aware of aperture, try using a variety, come close to objects, far away, experiment with various lighting situations.

week 1 Wed

Critique/Conversation

Compare and contrast contact sheets, interpreting which negatives are well exposed.

Demonstration

Using hand held light meter, and enlarging and printing in darkroom.

Two students present an artist each from our list.

Assignment

Shoot and develop 4 films, print contact sheets and at least 6 final prints, theme: "Come closer", bring materials for burning and dodging. Students will be assigned a photograph from the RISD museum to research and deliver a 5 minute talk about in the upcoming museum visit. Students should also present their own personal read of the work and its expression.

Learning outcomes from week 1

Understanding of all manual controls of the camera; full confidence in measuring light, determining exposure, and choosing aperture; understanding of chemical process and print; ability to diagnose negatives and evaluate prints; knowledge of important photographers; a basic understanding of the conceptual framework of photographs.

week 2 Mon

Field Trip

Visit to the RISD museum to examine original black and white prints from American artists such as Sally Mann, Duane Michals, Lee Friedlander and Walker Evans. We will analyse how elements like contrast and sharpness appear on the various photographic papers that each artist chose. Each student gives a short presentation analysing one of the artist's prints.

Critique/Conversation

Review the assignment "Come Closer". Inspect technical choices and issues and also consider conceptual underpinnings. Group discussion to generate ideas- we'll go in a circle and everyone can share their thoughts.

Demonstration

Burn and dodge.

Two students introduce artists' work from the list.

Assignment

"Waiting", shoot 1 film, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 2 finished prints

week 2 Tue

Critique/Conversation

Evaluate the execution and interpretation of the assignment theme and interpret technical choices.

Demonstration

Two students present artists' work

Field Trip

Visit to RISD library, explore resources for final project. Each student will find a book that they feel inspired by and present this work briefly to the class, using web search images to present on screen and illustrate the reasons they respond strongly.

Assignment

"My personal surroundings", shoot 4 films, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 6 finished prints.

Learning outcomes from week 2

Students are able to analyse prints and identify contrast, sharpness, density, and to apply dodge and burn techniques; have comprehension of and ability to perform technical developing and darkroom printing practices; have knowledge of historical photographic techniques; and are able to experiment with a conceptual approach to photography.

week 3 Mon

Extended Critique/Conversation

Discussing students directions and interests.

Demonstration/Practice

Two students introduce artists' work.

Alternative techniques; understanding photography's history, deepening awareness of light sensitive mediums and introduction to various printing techniques.

Introduction to the medium and large format camera

Experimenting with large and medium format cameras. Using film for medium format and paper negatives for large format.

Introduction to the assignment for the next day, showing artists who work with similar themes.

Assignment

"The 'I' of the beholder", shoot 1 film, develop, print contact sheets and minimum 2 finished prints.

week 3 Tue

Critique/Conversation

Dissecting the conceptual interpretation of the project. Evaluating technical choices and responding to the print execution.

Dialogue on the upcoming assignment. We'll go in a circle and everyone can share their thoughts and ideas.

Demonstrations

Two students introduce artists' work

Field Trip

Visit to the RISD library special collection, looking at artist books.

Assignment

"Is it real?", shoot 1 film, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 2 finished prints

**week 3 Wed****Critique/Conversation**

Examining the conceptual and technical choices for the assignment, with consideration of the development and adjustments after previous critiques.

Demonstration/Practice

Everyone presents ideas on their final work, followed by an in depth class discussion.

Two students introduce artists' work.

Assignment

Bring a one page written project proposal to class, if needed include sketches, shoot 4 films, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 6 finished prints, think about presentation of your final and talk about it in next class during crit.

Learning outcomes from week 3

Able to develop a concept using applied photographic techniques; comprehension of various ways of working with photo books; introductory level understanding of medium and large format cameras; have developed an overview of important photographic artists and their contribution to the field.

week 4 Mon**Critique/Conversation**

Surveying the work in progress for final project, also considering possible ways to present your work. One on one dialogue about final project, while the others print in the darkroom.

Assignment

Work on final project, min shoot 1 film, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 2 finished prints

week 4 Tue**Critique/Conversation**

Evaluation of work in progress for final project.

Practice

Printing time in class.

Assignment

Work on final project, shoot 4 films, develop, contact sheets, and minimum 6 finished prints

Learning outcomes from week 4

Ability to dissect and distinguish one's own work and the work of others through acquired technical knowledge, and question, interpret and define conceptual elements; learned to apply the critique process to develop a cohesive body of work.

week 5 Mon

Demonstration/Practice

Printing time for final project.

Presentations

25 minutes each (5) presentations, to present 10-12 prints to the class, present your concept, your inspirations (other artists), historical framework, technical choices, your editing and sequencing

Assignment

Complete major project

week 5 Tue

Presentations

25 minutes each (8 presentations) to present 10-12 prints to the class, present your concept, your inspirations (other artists), historical framework, technical choices, your editing and sequencing

Learning outcomes from week 5

Able to synthesize photographic techniques to realise a cohesive body of work and evaluate technical choices, editing, sequencing and presentation.



Class project assignment

The "I" of the beholder

Assignment

Think of your three most vivid childhood memories. How do you remember yourself? How do the photographs that you have from that time shape your memory? Go inwards.

Review the experimental writing exercise that we did in class "A Poem Score" from George Ella Lyon's "Where I'm From". Reflect.

Research your family album, Facebook, Instagram, or any platform where you find photographs of yourself from your past. What do they reveal? How do you feel about being portrayed in this way? Which images did you destroy from your history? Which ones did you keep? Why? How would you like to depict yourself? What would you wish to add to your family's history? Who are you? Who would you like to be? Make work.

Goals

To create 5 self portraits that draw on your personal history and an understanding of the genre.

To learn a method of research, conception and realisation of an idea photographically.

To gain an insight into your personal expression through the self portrait.

To apply the relevant photographic techniques that we've covered in class to achieve your personal vision.

Outcomes

A collection of sketches that map influences and references that document the research and conceptual development of your project. 20%

A presentation of your personal childhood experience and selected photographs that point people to the meaning and relevance of your choices. 20%

Five prints that demonstrate your technical and conceptual skills expressing your research outcomes 60%

Methods

Research artists: look at photographers that you're interested in from the presentation I gave in class or any other artists that you come across. Note what interests you in their work and how you can use this knowledge in your own work.

Research images of yourself: go through your photographs, review family albums, your mobile phone, social media platforms, ask friends to send photographs of yourself.

Shoot: when photographing consider all the technical and conceptual tools that we've discussed in class such as exposure time, aperture, lighting, the set up, background, what you wear, your posture, are you using a timer or does somebody photograph. Make intentional choices.

Print: be aware of all the tools that you have in the darkroom, look at the contrast, how light or dark would you like your image to be, which areas do you need to burn/dodge, cropping, consider the framing of the photograph, and if you would like to have a white border. Create five perfectly executed prints. They could be from several set ups and ideas or from one concept.

Prepare presentation: bring 5 images to class, photographs from your research, and your written story on one of your childhood memories, be prepared to present this to the group, discuss the artists that you've researched, how your project developed, what technical choices you've made and why.

Assessment

Basic competence:

All elements are completed: research sketches, research of other artists, writing on your childhood memory, bringing in of photographs from your past, submission of 5 images and a talk about your research.

Advanced level:

This project reflects your thorough and original critical thinking and making, your selected choices are clear and logical, you demonstrate excellent technical abilities in shooting and printing. Exceptional research and presentation skills.



Mid - semester feedback form



Introduction to B&W Analogue Photography

We're halfway through the course. Let's take a moment to reflect, so we can reinvent whatever is needed to make the most of our time. Please answer as honestly and precisely as you can. This is an anonymous form, but you can add your name if you wish.

1) How comfortable do you feel with the technical skills you've learned? If not, which techniques would you like more assistance with?

2) How helpful do you find the feedback that you get from your instructor in class? Do you feel that you have a clear idea of how to continue your work after class?

3) How would you rate the experience of the group crit? Do you find the feedback from your peers useful?

4) How would you rate the atmosphere in class? Do you feel comfortable to participate in class?

5) Do you find class assignments challenging and inspiring? Do you feel that they become more complex as your technical knowledge develops? Are there other themes you would like to explore?

6) Do you think the instructor manages the class fairly? For example the way resources are allocated or your critique time is scheduled.

Please circle always fair 5 4 3 2 1 unfair



RUBRIC

TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

PRESENTATION

3

outstanding understanding of camera use and darkroom skills, producing high quality prints

3

highly inventive, takes risks and succeeds

3

refined understanding of critical themes, strong reflection, insightful comments

3

thoroughly considered and perfectly executed visual and verbal presentation

2

clear understanding of learned skills, comfortable working independently and producing well executed prints

2

strong ideas and ability to pursue them rigorously

2

very engaged and visible progression of personal work after critiques, gives helpful responses in peer critique

2

high level of care and consideration of presentation

1

some understanding of the medium, but quality of prints could be improved

1

some ideas, but not particularly inventive, no clear development of these ideas

1

some adjustments made based on critique, very few ideas about the work of others

1

presentation has been somewhat considered, but without much attention to detail

0

failed to understand the medium, cannot operate a camera or produce darkroom prints on a basic level

0

no originality or coherence

0

no response to critique verbally or through project progression, no valuable critique or insights given

0

minimal effort, incongruent presentation

12 = A+

11 = A

10 = A-

9 = B+

8 = B

7 = B-

6 = C+

5 = C

4 = C-

3 = D+

2 = D

1 = D-