

TERRESTRIAL+

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY & ETHICS

Essential Question: How do photographers use the language of art in communication?

Jim Casper said, "The language of photography continues to get more interesting and complex as it becomes the most universal medium of communication worldwide." This statement challenges photographers to create more meaningful works that deserve a more prolonged existence due to living in an era of endless content streaming with social media networks and the modern dynamics of sharing pictures. So to create meaningful work that is effective in communication, we need to define our style and understand the audience that will be reading and consuming our images.

Essential Question: How is photography analyzed and understood?

It can be argued that a photograph isn't simply a moment captured in time, but that it also has an intended meaning and hopes of an effect on its audience. When most of us look at a photograph, we simply see the meaning on the surface but photographs can have deeper meanings. Photographers, just like writers and other artists, use a set of rules to convey meaning in their work. They use the tricks of their trade to mean one thing on the surface and mean something completely different upon closer examination.

Below are some things to consider when analyzing a photograph...

- What does the camera angle tell us about the photograph?
 - A low angle might make the subject seem larger than reality, while a high angle makes the subject look very small
- What does the framing tell us about the photograph?
 - What is the main focal point of the photograph? How is the subject framed with the photo? A close-up might convey more power than a wide shot. What is in the background of the photograph, and does that background add to the photo's overall message?
- What does the lighting tell us about the photograph?
 - Is the subject lit very brightly, giving the impression of clarity and openness, or is the subject darkly lit, giving the impression of something mischievous or devious going on? Is the lighting soft with barely any shadow, or hard with sharp shadows?
- What does the subject and its positioning tell us about the photograph?
 - If there is more than one subject in the photo, how do the subjects relate to each other? Do we see the entire subject or only a portion of it? If the subject is a person, are they looking at the camera or looking away? Are they serious, happy, sad, or mischievous?

Essential Question: How does photography impact societies and how do societies impact photography?

Photography is the ultimate tool for capturing our surroundings with a realistic approach. Due to the very nature of capturing evidence, it has impacted the way we remember things from our past. From global-scale events to domestic and familiar occurrences, photography has shaped the way we remember things. However, photography can also be an unreliable tool for capturing our surroundings as photographers can oversimplify a complicated issue or display the subject out of context.

Essential Question: Regarding the ethics of travel photography, how does a foreigner (photographer) properly represent the culture or national identity of the local (indigenous subject)?

Travel photography is developed by the ethnographic photography practices of the 19th century as photographers were sponsored by western governments and institutions to capture images of exotic lands and diverse people (the "other" or "primitive"). This appeal of exotic literature of the West established photography as a colonial medium as it became a vital aspect of European colonialism, entangling an occupation of space and anxiety of intention. However, travel photographers today contemplate access to authenticity in documenting the culture or national identity in their travels as they are attentive to details of the "unexplored" or "undiscovered", invalidating the experience and history of indigenous groups and centering themselves in their photographs.

Essential Question: What is the goal of portrait photography?

The main purpose of portrait photography is to capture the essence of the model's natural state and personality as the subject. However, the practice of portrait photography raises questions about the power dynamics between the photographer and model.

The act of taking a photograph becomes both a triumphant gesture of acquisition and a source of anxiety about representation. Portrait photographers are to emphasize the representation of the model but often engage in sadistic behaviors of hostility towards the model by controlling the environment and constructing the model's costume. This authoritative practice enables the photographer to center their vision of the model rather than the model's subjectivity which becomes emptied and flattened, objectifying the body as a composition rather than the subject.

VISITING ARTIST LECTURES

Nicholas Muellner – Making Doubles

Although Nicholas Muellner has a comparative language background, he identifies himself as a photographer rather than a writer. The act of writing is not his way of understanding the world. Muellner uses the art of photography as an existential tool of experiencing in order to understand the relational systems of the world. An example of this approach is his landscape images in *The Particular* (1999-2003) series. Muellner's technique of using broken 1950's wedding photographer cameras that leaked light and shifting the focus between the blurred background or foreground conveys a difficulty of seeing through the end of something for the viewer. The setting of being in an unknown natural space such as the forest especially conveys this message of difficulty as the viewer may question what is beyond what is seen immediately and reconsider their relationship to what is unknown to them in their personal life. Muellner also uses photography as an interface to literary, political, and personal narratives, enabling him to establish a visual vocabulary by integrating language in his process of image-making. For example, Muellner explores the personal and sociopolitical histories of his identity and its relationship to Russia in *The Amnesia Pavilions* (1990-92/2009). This work contains a series of photographs made in two versions of the same country by two distinct versions of the same artist, which creates a conversation of the personal growth between the two artists and the sociopolitical differences between the two countries. The art of photography is also used as a documentary pursuit of significant personal and cultural histories or lack thereof which is expressed through Muellner's *Final Report* (2004-2009). The *Final Report* (2004-2009) is a series of photographs that capture the void or ignorance of sites that foster unattainable historical, political, and individual experiences of agency to potentially make a change in the world. However, the documentation of absence through the frozen and muted images provides a message that the legibility of the past is definite in the present and future.

It's intriguing that Nicholas Muellner acknowledges the set of possibilities and limitations within the art of photography. This acknowledgment enables the artist to challenge the limitations of a medium by utilizing them as potential possibilities. For example, Muellner uses the difficulty of combining text and image as a way of constituting a personal visual vocabulary and uses the difficulty of documenting histories towards recognizing the historical meaning through psychological narratives. These models of approach are exemplified through Muellner's *Re-enactment — Winter's Campaign* (2003). *Re-enactment — Winter's Campaign* (2003) invites the viewer to reflect on the power and significance of a historical site charged with war and massacre through the muffled experiences of struggling oblique figures in a snowy landscape, presenting an experience for the viewer to establish a personal yet distant relationship to the site and figures captured. Therefore, Nicholas Muellner values the personal psychological narratives of a historical site through photography in order to provide an open experience for the viewer to build a personal connection with something that is so impersonal.

Whitney Hubbs – Trials, Errors, and Some Successes!

Whitney Hubbs uses her creative practices to express her found freedom and self-discovery of femininity, providing a cathartic experience for her. This form of expression is especially relevant

to her early artistic and activist works of fanzines organized art shows, and performances when she was involved in the punk rock grrrl community, a punk-feminist community and provoke young women and girls' subcultural resistance and exploration of radical political identities. Hubbs explores what it means to photograph the female body in an empowering way. Through an abstract examination of the female body, Hubbs achieves this goal by disposing of the male gaze of women depicted as muses or objects of desire and realizes that the women depicted have to fight for control of their own images. She demonstrates these ideas in her *Body Doubles* (2016) exhibition through themes of ownership and self-reflection. The exhibition depicts the nude female form through a performative and directorial nature of photographing women's bodies. Hubbs hired models of similar stature and complexion to be stand-ins for her and to act accordingly to how she would perform in front of the camera. Hubbs anonymized and fragmented their nude bodies and photographed them with their heads out of frame or their faces turned away. Hubbs constructed and deconstructed the female form by emphasizing that that body is made up, using limbs, torsos, and other intricacies to create a wonderful perspective of the human body as well as the dichotomies of primitive and evolved to raw and refined. Hubbs' works are minimal yet intense due to her wanting the viewer to feel more rather than intellectualize the image. She wants the images to provide an "intense stare" and to convey raw emotions through a nuanced idea of existentialism and ambiguity through a form of performative photography. Hubbs uses photography to document the ideas of chaos and order, act and choice, and angst and surrealism.

I found it to be profound that Whitney Hubbs accepts failure and recognizes her efforts throughout her creative practice of archiving previous works for future reference and experimentation. This process enables an artist to keep a personal library for them to understand that failure is success in progress by realizing that failure is acceptable because failure is the seed of growth and success. Artists need to challenge themselves and go beyond their perceived limits in order to reach their true potential and develop their personal narratives. Thus, I believe that Whitney Hubbs values the act of naivety and fluidity because it enables an artist to grow through failure. acknowledge their growth and development.

READING LIST

- Camera: A History of Photography from Daguerreotype to Digital by Todd Gustavson
- The Art of Photography: A Personal Approach to Artistic Expression by Bruce Barnbaum
- Photography: A Cultural History by Mary Marien Warner
- On Photography by Susan Sontag
- Extraordinary Everyday Photography by Brenda Tharp and Jed Manwaring
- The Photographer's Eye by Michael Freeman
- The Photographer's Mind by Michael Freeman
- Pictures of Half-Truth: On Politics & Photography by James Fleming
- The Twenty-First-Century Experience: Photography and Language by James Fleming
- Regarding Family Photography in Contemporary Latinx Art by Deanna Ledezma
- Queering the Paternal Archive: Photography, Hybridity, and Embodiment in Pilar Monsell's Africa 815 by Sarah Thomas
- Visual Literacy and 1960s Photography by Josh Ellenbogen and Adam Jolles
- The Politics of Documentary Photography: Three Theoretical Perspectives by Dermot Hodson
- Marie Høeg's worldmaking photography: a photo essay by K.J. Rawson and Nicole Tantum
- Where We Find Ourselves: The Photographs of Hugh Mangum, 1897–1922 by Margaret Sartor
- Photography as a Measure of Constricted Construing: The Experience of Depression Through a Camera by Emma Hanieh and Berly M. Walker
- Portraiture: Facing Brazilian Primitivism by Mario de Andrade
- Photography is a very intimate act by Anya Harrison