

VAST 299-01: Photo 2: Analog to Digital

Wednesday & Friday, 9-10:50am | Millard 2, Studio 13 | Spring 2012

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Introduction:

Photography is a medium in transition. That is, we are travelling at ever-faster rates towards a world without film-based photography. (In fact, Kodak has just filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Protection making the future of film-based photography even less certain!) In this course, as the titles suggests, we will be working through that transition. In a way, this course will bring us back to the world in which you, the college student of 2012, are native. In other words, in Photo 1, we stepped into history (and out of our contemporary moment) to learn the basic concepts and properties of photography. Over the course of your studies in Photo 1, you accumulated knowledge and aptitudes. You will continue that path in Photo 2, but you will end this course where you started the last—as a digital native, but with a wealth of new knowledge and experience to enrich your position and understanding of your world.

Course overview:

While Photo 1 was largely about learning how to see photographically (*“The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.”* –Dorothea Lange), this course will have a different focus. It will, however, build upon the lessons learned and skills developed in Photo 1. You will build on your proficiency operating a 35-mm film camera and your darkroom processing savvy. You will build upon the development of your photographic eye through experimentation with an expanded photographic apparatus (detailed herein). The central goal of this course is to enhance and expand your current abilities while cultivating your own photographic voice.

The first half of the semester will be dedicated to film-based, wet photography. During this period, you will start move away from your trusty 35-mm film camera and the more traditional processes covered in Photo 1. You will have the opportunity to shoot with various medium-format cameras that take 120-mm film. In addition, you will have the opportunity to experiment with other printing surfaces and larger format printing.

During the second half of the semester, we will transition into color, digital photography. You will learn proper operation of DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) cameras, basic image editing using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 3, and high-quality inkjet printing. (The full Adobe Creative Suite (CS5) is available but we will be focusing on Lightroom.)

Assignments:

Throughout the course of this semester, you will be responsible for completing five studio projects and one paper while maintaining a journal or blog throughout. Below are the basic parameters for your studio projects. More complete instructions and explanations will be distributed as needed. Please note, these assignments are generally less specific than the assignments in Photo 1. In this class, there will be a greater emphasis on individual initiative, creativity, and ingenuity. Therefore these projects were designed to give you maximum flexibility within some basic parameters.

Assignment 1: 35-mm Redux/OBJECT (due Friday, February 3): This project serves as a refresher to jump-start your photographic endeavors this semester. Using your 35-mm SLR film camera and 100-speed film, you will create a series of five, 8x10-inch prints. For the content of these

photos, choose an object and first photograph it as accurately and objectively as possible in a studio setting. For the next four photos, you should take your chosen object and photograph it in four different, unpredictable contexts. The resulting images should show how photography can indeed be documentary—it can indeed tell the truth, but it can also play with and alter our perception of reality through humor and absurdity. Your series then can be silly or serious, trivial or profound. This is the place and time to start thinking about your individual point of view and voice. Whatever direction you take, be sincere and commit fully to your point of view.

The objectives for this project are two-fold. (1) Prove your technical abilities in taking and printing B+W photos. (Don't forget about the quality of your presentation.) (2) To start thinking "outside the box."

Assignment 2: **Enlarging the Frame/OTHER** (due Wednesday, February 22): There are two components to this project: (1) to increase the scale of the photographic apparatus that you use (both the camera and the printing) and (2) to explore your outward gaze.

The camera lens has a way of scrutinizing the surface of its subject in a manner that is not possible within the constraints of real-time. The eye of the viewer, whether the viewer is the image's audience or its creator, is given the time and space to wander over the surface of the object of desire (the Other) as re-presented in the image, in a rather intimate, yet one-sided, voyeuristic way. There is general agreement that the male gaze, aided by the camera, accounts for much of visual world we encounter through both fine art and popular culture.

The Other has also been re-presented, not necessarily as the object of desire, but as a potential source for knowledge and understanding. The power structure at play here is not dissimilar from the one described above. Here, the photojournalist, documentarian, or anthropologist, looks out at his (I'm using gender here purposefully) subject to garner some new knowledge and, as we know, knowledge is power.

For this project, you are to engage the Other with your photographic gaze. You are to draw upon your own desires and/or quest for knowledge to determine your specific subject; you are to reign in your subject and take control of its/her/his/their image. OR, you can refuse this paradigm and forge a new path for engaging someone or something that is outside of yourself, that is more sympathetic and less authoritative. Whatever path you choose, you will use a medium-format camera with 120-mm film to produce three 16x20-inch gelatin silver prints.

Paper: (due Wednesday, March 14): Write a 5-7-page critical response paper to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (available on Moodle), which is an essential text in the study of photography. You should use at least two secondary printed sources in crafting your response to this seminal text. (You should have no trouble finding supporting texts as much has been written in response to this work.) This text will not be covered during class time, but you are welcome to form a reading/study group to work through the text. Obviously, however, the paper you submit should be original and independent. You should feel free to draw upon your own experience in the practice of photography (and/or other media) to support your response.

Assignment 3: **Breaking the Frame/SELF** (due Wednesday, March 21): How do we identify ourselves? Do we define ourselves by the sports we play, music we listen to, people we love, the God we pray to (or not)? Are our true selves essential and fixed? Or are our identities fluid and

evolving? These questions represent the “tip of the iceberg” when it comes to the study and exploration of identity.

There are two components to this project: (1) to experiment with alternative photographic processes, materials, techniques, and presentation and (2) to explore notions of identity and the self.

For this project, you are to dive into *yourself*. Whether you do so by creating an alter ego (as in Jekyll and Hyde, for example) or by plumbing the depths of your psyche, is up to you. You can consider this project a kind of non-traditional self-portrait that may or may not include your image.

We will discuss in greater depth, the technical aspects of this project during class. Your options will be many—from large-format “mural” printing, to printing on alternative surfaces using a liquid photographic emulsion, to producing a book, to creating an installation using photographs and ephemera. The possibilities are almost limitless.

Assignment 4: **Artist Mentor** (due Wednesday, April 11 & Friday, April 13): This project has two components:

- (1) Research an artist who inspires you. A list of suggestions will be provided, but you do not have to limit yourself to that list, nor do you have to limit yourself to photographers. Prepare a 10-minute (no more) oral presentation on your artist mentor. Your presentation should include some biographical information in addition to an overview of his/her work and process. Your interpretations and impressions of the artist’s work should be prominently featured in your presentation. Your presentation should include a Powerpoint-type visual component with high quality images. Consult with Janis DesMarais, Visual Resources Coordinator (O’Kane 497) if you are having trouble finding images. You must also submit a written version of your presentation with all appropriate scholarly apparatus (i.e. footnotes and bibliography). [N.B. Because many of the artists you will choose from are contemporary, there may or may not be much published, printed material available for your research. Be careful and thorough in vetting any online sources you use (as you always should). It is always preferable to use material from known, reputable sources.]
- (2) Create an image or series of images inspired by your artist mentor using a DSLR camera and associated digital apparatus. Images should be printed using the Epson 4900 in the Photo Studio.

Assignment 5: **Final project** (due Friday, May 4): Your final project will be entirely self-determined. You can use any technique touched on over the course of the semester. You can use analog or digital photography, or even a combination of the two. This project is essentially the culmination of two-semesters of progress and what you produce should reflect that in its stature and significance. Be ambitious! You are limited only by your imagination and technical prowess.