

Photography as Art in the Modernist Era
School for New Learning / DePaul University class # 36836 cat # AI 216 901-905
Spring Quarter 2009 Saturdays 9:00a–Noon
Class Location: TBA

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Evenings by appointment

Syllabus / Photography as Art in the Modernist Era

Why is it that certain photographs from amateur, commercial, documentary or news sources have now become collectable as art? And why (or how) could the term ‘art’ be extended to include pictures made with a machine, copied from life and often are the product of accident? If such images are so honored from many thousands of others isn’t the art more about the editing and selection? And what happens if the selector was not the photographer? In many cases the makers did not see themselves artists. How much do the intentions the photographer figure into all of this? Can a maker of photograph be an artist and not know it? And who decides when a work becomes an art product? These questions can be asked of many creative media but photography in particular has been very vexed by them.

But 19th century photographers with serious aesthetic intentions did not wait for such discussions or for future generations to define photographic art. Their models mimicked the conventions from fine art painting which at best granted the camera second-class citizenship among the arts. It would remain for the 20th century Modernists to define what this medium uniquely has to contribute in an increasingly secular and mechanized world. Their answers and the answers of later critics established excepted norms for defining photography as a visual art. Their ideas read like a chronicle of modern thought. Recognition of photography-as-art by the professional art establishment begins with the Modernist Era (roughly 1918-1977). This class might also be termed a study of Modernism as seen through five distinct periods within art photography.

Most photography is solidly connected to presenting life and evidence of things real. Such pictures will be our main areas of investigation in this class. Abstract art, a 20th century invention in painting and sculpture, has its parallel in art photography. Known too by the term “non-objective photography” these images (often made without the use of a camera) have an important place in modernist photography. We will examine these, also. However our main focus will be realistic imagery.

This course will also examine the logic of earlier models for art photography dating from the mid 1800s. Likewise, in the final weeks we will study how today’s critics have “re-read” fine art and documentary photographs through a Post-modernist lens.

Two field trips will be scheduled: The Art Institute of Chicago and The Museum of Contemporary Photography (Columbia College).

Offered Competencies....

A-1-B: Can use public or private institutions as resources for exploring arts or ideas.

A-1-C: Can analyze artistic or textual works in terms of form, content, and style.

A-1-E: Can interpret the work of writers or artists within a historical or social context.

A-2-A: Can create an original work of art, explore its relationship to artistic form, and reflect on the creative process.

(competencies, continued)

A-3-E: Can compare substantially different theological or philosophical systems.

A-5: Can define and analyze a creative process.

S-3-E: Can describe how scientific or technological knowledge affects perspectives on the relationships between humans and nature.

Many of the above categories may be approached as an “X”
with consultation and approval of instructor.

Please Note:

All students must be registered and listed on the class roster by the beginning of the second week of the term. Students not on the roster by this time cannot stay in the class under any circumstances. Please contact the SNL Advising Center (snladvicing@depaul.edu) or the Office of Financial Aid (finaid@depaul.edu) to work out your particular situation.

Students who need to withdraw from the course must do so by the end of the second week of the quarter. After that point is reached, 100% tuition is charged. It is possible to withdraw from a course or competence through the end of the seventh week of the quarter, but there is no tuition refund after the end of the second week.

In certain circumstances (such as illness, death of family members, natural disasters, etc.), a late withdrawal will be refunded tuition. These circumstances must be documented, and presented to the University through the SNL Exceptions Committee (snlexceptions@depaul.edu). In no case is such a refund allowed more than once during a student’s career at DePaul.

Definition of an Art Photograph (in this course, at least)...any photograph produced intentionally for the purpose of (or functioning later as such) creating an aesthetic reaction in its viewer and/or to make commentary on its subject matter through defined aesthetics, illusions or metaphors. These outcomes are not solely limited to the original intentions of the photographer. Contemporary or later appreciators may discover in the work an artistic effect which stands in parallel to the original reason for the image was made.

Or putting it another way

- (1) Any photograph produced for the express purpose of creating an aesthetic reaction in the viewer and/or to make commentary on the literal subject through aesthetics, illusion or metaphor.
- (2) The above BUT not by the intentions of the maker. At a later time, viewers (critics) may discover an artistic effect in the image to parallel the original function of the image.

The latter two definitions above would include the photographic work of both professional and amateurs. In the first, the intentions of the maker hold sway, regardless of audience acceptance. (If the ‘artist’ says it’s a duck, it is one.) In the second definition, the ‘duck’ is discovered; it is a creation of the viewers

which has gained some general level of acceptance. Here, the development of the mindset which makes the discovery possible (the ongoing evolution of critical thought) is sometimes more engaging than the work itself. The work, then, (whether a photograph, painting, literature or a piece of music) also becomes a vehicle for illustrating a mindset-or timeset.

The word 'Art' carries such baggage as to confuse and excludes much of the cannon of important images which were done as documents, scientific records, amateur snapshots and the like (as in definition 2). One remedy is to substitute a broader term "Creative" for "Artistic". This enables us to short circuit the baggage we carry with the term "Art" as we explore the original and evolving thinking behind some of the photographs valued so highly by critics, art museums and collectors of art.

To do this, we must pursue three goals. First, we must become familiar with the technical history of photography. Second, we must become acquainted with those photographic works deemed most important. Third, we must come to know the major players, the photographers and their critics. What were their motives? How do their ideas parallel or clash with other developments in the other arts and 20th century Modernist (Western) culture?

We will show progress in reaching these goals mainly through analyses of the individual photographs. Assigned readings in the required text, course packet and books placed on reserve will supply the concepts, background information, examples of photographs (and of critical writing methodologies). The readings will be discussed in class and further examples (slide examples) will be provided.

The class is structured chronologically to cover these major periods within Modernist creative photography.

Late Pictorialism (1889-1918...a precursor to Modernism.
Straight Photography
Documentary Subjectivism (mature Modernism)
Formalism (Modernism's last hurrah)

(as in all things academic, the lines between can be somewhat fuzzy and open to debate)

Although containing its own unique elements, Photographic Pictorialism derives from movements within other visual and the decorative arts. This is also true of Abstraction. With photography some image-makers closely allied themselves with their Modernist counterparts in painting (photographers who called themselves 'Dadaist', 'Constructivist', 'Surrealists', etc.). The later periods were distinctly 'home grown' and stylistically based upon pre-existing photographic approaches....uniquely a photographic construction. What is interesting in how ideas from these later periods began to cross-pollinate painting and other visual and literary arts. (The pendulum swings both ways.)

Today, assumptions we made during the greater part of the 20th century about Art and almost every other aspect of the Western cultural tradition have been challenge (and de-constructed, if you will).

Enter Postmodernism. A generation of photographers have immersed where message takes precedent over (or becomes) the style and form. But also, creative photographers continue today to make photographs in the style of the Modernist Periods and many (and their promoters, also) have positioned their works in more contemporary contexts. Others do not. They continue in the older mindsets. Still others have revived older 18th century technical (camera and darkroom practices) and stylistic approaches. Today as always creative photographers work in many camps. Some are more visible than others.

Required Text: Hulick and Marshall; Photography-1900 to the Present; Prentice-Hall; Upper Saddle River, NJ 1998. ISBN 0-13-254095-9.

Other assigned readings in photocopied or on line will be assigned throughout the course.

On Grading

Your course grade will be determined by the following:

-Two Research Papers will be assigned. The first will be analytical in nature and should discuss a major topic or issue presented in the readings and/or class discussions. The second paper would cover an historical or biographical aspect within a particular period within Modernism. This paper should include an appendix of at least 4 images (photographs or other visual works) as photocopies with a in-depth discussion of the images. Both research papers should be at least 5 pages in length. Each will contribute 25% to the final grade. (50% of your final grade)

-Two BlueBook Quizzes will be given (May 2nd and June 6th). Students will respond to two of four questions taken from course materials. Sample questions will be issued one week prior. *Students may bring in prepared notes for the BlueBook quiz.* Each will weigh in at 5% (10% of your final grade).

-Four Image Reading Assignments (IRAs) issued periodically throughout the quarter. Students will be given specific instructions for each; guidelines on how to present your reactions and how to critique these images. The IRA images will be posted on Blackboard. The four IRAs will represent one additional writing assignment (2-3 pages, minimum, for each IRA, 8-12 pages, total). 6¼ % each for a combined gradeweight of 25%.

Writing assignments will be graded and returned with comments.

Students may submit one re-write of the Midterm paper and one IRA submission to raise the initial grade.

-Participation: These include participating in class discussions, the field trips and submitting written notes (with some reflection) on assigned readings. Bring these notes to class for use in discussion. They will be collected periodically, reviewed and returned. Gradewighted at *approximately** 15%.

* Participation is expected and, as such, not *numerically* graded. Lack of Participation, however, may lower your final grade by one-half letter. Attendance is a part of this. One unexcused absence is allowed.

Individual meetings during my office hours are encouraged to review your grades and suggestions made on returned assignments. A meeting can be scheduled after any class session. My office hours are posted but other times (evenings) can be arranged. Email for an appointment. One such meeting is required, sometime around midterm is recommended.

Calendar

Sessions One / April 4th

Introduction. Historical Background. Slide presentation. Early History of Photography: the Daguerrean Era 1839-1865, Early Documentary 1850-1900, Early Fine Arts Photography 1850-1885. Photographers: Talbot, Southworth and Hawes, Brady, Rejlander, Robinson, Hawarden, and Cameron. Critics: Poe, Delacroix, Talbot, Lady Eastlake.

Read pps. 1-18. the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read from Warren; Photography: A Concise Guide (*from the course packets*)
pps. 173-195

Sessions Two / April 11th

Slide Presentation: Naturalism and Late Pictorialism; the Linked Ring, the Photo-Secession and early appearances of modernist trends, 1889-1918. Photographers: Emerson, Kasebier, Stieglitz, Steichen, Colburn and the Photo-Secession. Critics: Pennell, Steiglitz, Caflin, Hartmann, Rood and Demachy.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) One posted at the BlackBoard *Grade Center*.

Observations due to the Grade Center by Monday, 4/13. Background Information available at the Grade Center on Tuesday, 4/14. Critiques should be posted there by Sunday, 4/19.

Read pps. 19-38. the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read from Goldberg; Photography in Print (*from the course packets*)
pps.210-213; an excerpt from Pennell essay, *Is Photography Among the Fine Arts?*
214-217; Stieglitz essay, *The Hand Camera-Its Present Importance*.

Read from Lyons; Photographers on Photography (*from the course packets*)
pps. 55-60; Demachy essay. *On the Straight Print*.

(suggested reading) Eisinger; Trace and Transformation; Chapter I; Pictorialism – on reserve.

Sessions Three / April 18th

Slide presentation: Early Documents become Art *and* Photographic Art recognizes a 'Documentary Style', 1900-1935. Photographers: F. Johnston, Hine, Atget, Abbott.; Curtis, Ulmann; Sander, Walker Evans. Filmmakers: Flaherty. Critics: Kirsten, Trachtenberg, Sekula, Abbott and Walker Evans.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Two posted at the BlackBoard *Grade Center*.

Observations due to the Grade Center by Monday, 4/20. Background Information available at the Grade Center on Tuesday, 4/21. Critiques should be posted there by Sunday, 4/26.

Read pps. 39-52, 105-108, the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read from Goldberg, Photography in Print (*from the course packets*)
pps. 358-369; Katz, *An Interview with Walker Evans*.
254-257; an excerpt from Abbott, *The World of Atget*.

Sessions Four / April 25th

Sample Questions for BlueBook Quiz #1, issued. BB Quiz #1 will be given on May 3rd.

Suggested themes and topic areas for Midterm Research Paper issued and discussed. Write a synopsis / abstract (of at least 40 words) and post to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Monday, May 4th. The draft of this paper should be posted to Blackboard's *Grade Center* no later than Tuesday, May 12th. One re-write of this paper will be accepted.

Slide presentation on the 'Straight Photography' Movement, 1918-1948. Photographers: Later Stieglitz, Strand, Sheeler, Weston, A. Adams, Cunningham and the F64 group. Critics: Strand, N.& B. Newhall, Ansel Adams, Weston; Thurber and Mortensen.

Read pps. 71-79, 154-156, the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read from Goldberg; Photography in Print; Brown (*from the course packets*)
pps. 276-290; Brown, *An Interview with Paul Strand*.
310-314; Edward Weston, an excerpt from his *Daybooks*.
335-338; Thurber, *Has Photography Gone Too Far?*

(suggested reading) Eisinger; Trace and Transformation
excerpts from Chapter II, Straight Photography – on reserve.

Session Five / May 2nd

Class discussions on the readings. BB Quiz #1 given.

Slide presentation on Subjectivism, Part One: Photographers for Mass Communication. Eisenstadt, Bourke-White, *LIFE* magazine; Cartier-Bresson, W.E. Smith and *Magnum*. Rise of the photojournalist as celebrity (and perhaps considered by some, an artist). Reactions in popular criticism of the 40s and 50's (McClausland, Kramer, Downes) and later re-evaluation by modern critics.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Three posted at the BlackBoard *Grade Center*.

Observations due to the Grade Center by Monday, 5/4. Background Information available at the Grade Center on Tuesday, 5/5. Critiques should be posted there by Sunday, 5/10.

Read pps. 95-101, 101-105, 115-124, 125-143.....Photography-1900 to the Present.

(suggested reading....from Eisinger; Trace and Transformation
excerpts from Chapter IV, Popular Criticism & Chapter V, Subjectivism– on reserve.

Session Six / May 9th

BlueBook Quiz #1 returned with grade and discussion.

Midterm Research Paper due: Post to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Monday, May 11th.

Slide presentation on the Documentary Aesthetic: Governmental information agencies, amateur groups and big business use photographer's creative talents for their various agendas, 1930-1960. Photographers: Lange, Rothstein, Post-Wolcott and the FSA; Grossman, Siskind, Levitt and the Photo-League. Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibition and Robert Frank's book, *The Americans*; Popular Criticism of the 40s and 50's and contemporary re-evaluations. Critics: McClausland, Kramer, Downes

Read from Goldberg; Photography in Print (from the course packets)

pps. 349-354; Styker, *The FSA Collection of Photographs*
355-357; Taylor, *Migrant Mother: 1936*

(suggested reading) from Eisinger; Trace and Transformation,
Chapter III: Documentary Photography- on reserve.

Session Seven / May 16th

Slide Presentation: A move to Formalism. 1939-1960's. From Beaumont Newhall to John Szarkowski at MOMA. Photographic criticism is taken up in mainstream academic journals. Photography becomes an area of study in art departments of major universities. Fashion Photography becomes a collectable art. Minor White and *Aperture Magazine* and the rise of serious photographic journals. Photographers: Horst, Penn; Callahan, Siskind, H.H.Smith, Sommers; Minor White. Critics: White, H. H. Smith; Benjamin, Szarkowski, Gene Thornton.

Suggested themes and topic areas for Final Research Paper issued and discussed. Write a synopsis / abstract (of at least 40 words) and post to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Monday, May 25th. Post your draft copy of the Final Research Paper to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Wednesday, June 3rd. The final version should be posted to Blackboard's *Grade Center* no later than Thursday, June 9th.

Read pps., 144-150; 156-160; 166-174. 211-217, the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

(suggested reading) pps. 52-78, Eisinger; Trace and Transformation
excerpts from Chapter VII, Formalism– on reserve.

Sessions Eight / May 23rd

Sample questions for BlueBook Quiz #2, issued. BB Quiz #2 will be given on June 7th, Session Ten.

Post your draft copy of the Final Research Paper to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Wednesday, June 3rd. The final version should be posted to Blackboard's *Grade Center* no later than Thursday, June 9th.

Slide presentation: Later Formalism of the 60's and 70's. Photographers: Friedlander, Winnograd, Michels, Meyerowitz, Klein, Arbus, and Kuldalka. Critics: Szarkowski, Barthes, and Green.

Image Reading Assignment (IRA) Four posted at the BlackBoard *Grade Center*.

Observations due to the Grade Center by Monday, 5/25. Background Information available at the Grade Center on Tuesday, 5/26. Critiques should be posted there by Sunday, 5/31.

Read pps., 175-202, 206-209, 211-217, the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read from Wells; The Photography Reader (*from the course packet*)
pps. 97-103; Szarkowski, Introduction to The Photographer's Eye.

Read Sontag's, *In Plato's Cave*, the first essay from the collection, On Photography (.pdf format at BlackBoard *Assignments*.)

Sessions Nine / May 30st

Slide presentation: Postmodernism, 1970's to the present. Certain artists from other disciplines create photo constructions and installations by commissioning photographs to be made or appropriating the images of others. The subject matter within of photographs becomes vehicles to examine questions of perception, memory, identity and the medium itself. Less of the world, more *about* the world. Many traditional photographers also adopt this approach.

Slide Presentation: Photography as Metaphor, Fiction and Autobiography. Enter the Multi-media Artists Warhol, Heinecken, Baldessari, Kruger and Hockney; Traditional image-makers (photographers): Josephsen, Krims, Gibson, Witkin, Robert Adams, Mapplethorpe, Sherman and Weems. Critics: Jussim, Sekula, Crimp and Solomon-Godeau.

Read pps., 244-263, 302-308, the class text; Photography-1900 to the Present.

Read pps. in Wells; The Photography Reader (from the course packet)

147-151, Introduction to Part Four.

164-179, Grundberg, *The Crisis of the Real: Photography and Modernism*.

Post your draft copy of the Final Research Paper to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Wednesday, June 3rd. I will respond by email making suggestions for your 'ready for publication' final version which should be posted to Blackboard's *Grade Center* by Thursday, June 9th.

Session Ten / June 6th

There is no final exam...unless you count BlueBook Quiz #2. Class Discussion on the BlueBook questions and other topics from the class.

Optional session: June 11th for individual meetings. Same time and place.