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1-2014

ARTZ 486.01: Advanced Research - Photography

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Recommended Citation

Hamon, Matthew M., "ARTZ 486.01: Advanced Research - Photography" (2014). *Syllabi*. 1160.

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“What lives in pictures is very difficult to define. It finally becomes a thing beyond the thing portrayed -some sort of section of the soul of the artist that gets detached and comes out to one from the picture. I believe that the “living thing” must be in the heart before it can be brought to life by an artist.” -Francis Bruguere

Advanced Research; Photography (ARTZ 486) Tue 4:10-7:00: Investigation of photography with emphasis on student proposals, including specific technical and conceptual aspects. Prerequisites are either Photo-II (ARTZ-384) or The Art of Digital Photography (ARTZ-385), or the equivalent from another institution. If you haven't completed a prerequisite course please speak with me immediately.

Preface: Essentially, this is a course about photographic (or lens based) content. Aside from a few technical exercises early in the semester, there will be very little technical instruction during this course. This course presumes that you have a solid technical foundation in either analogue, digital, or some other lens based imaging process and are prepared to work independently. However, I am happy to assist students individually with their specific technical needs in relationship to their emerging portfolio.

Photography: The central theme of this program will be photography (or lens-based imaging), though you are welcome to address this as specifically or tenuously as you choose... If you decide to work in an alternative mode or process (video, alt processes, photo synthesis, etc.) please bring it to my attention within the first couple of weeks of the course.

Course Objectives: The photographic image pervades every aspect of our culture. An image's meanings can be evasive and change with context, but they are always present and must be approached critically. This program is designed for intermediate or advanced artists working in any medium (film, digital, or both) and will emphasize seeing, thinking and creating with thoughtful inquiry in hopes of providing a better understanding of the construction and manipulation of an image's meaning and form. The objectives of this course are to refine each student's individual studio practice through academic inquiry into contemporary issues in photography, the development a cohesive portfolio of work, crafting an eloquent and articulate written statement about the finished portfolio, and engaging in a formal presentation of this work.

At this point in your development as an artist, you should be ready to intensely focus on a chosen subject to the degree that you can articulate a personal point of view in relationship to that subject. Your point of view should reveal the depth and breadth of your enquiry. Additionally, you should be making formal or stylistic decisions only to the degree that they support the content in your work. Art making is an examination and observation of who we are in relation to our world. Vision and language are the principle elements by which we experience and define our world, and we can use them to reveal things that would otherwise be invisible to us. This is where we will begin. We will see how far we are willing to push the parameters of how we individually experience, define and reveal our world. You were born with what is essential to do this. These revelations can be made in many ways and with many tools. The goal here will be to create a supportive community of practicing artists with the aim of collectively addressing each artist's effort to refine the form and content of their work.

We will begin the semester by engaging in a technical assignment using large format cameras and a second assignment using studio lighting. Ultimately, we will shift to independent studio projects (you should immediately be thinking about a project or subject that can sustain your interests for the next 15 weeks). Throughout the semester we will discuss films and readings on contemporary photography and photographers. Within the context of the production of photographs, we will also be engaged in an intensive academic enquiry into matters of photo theory. We will engage in regularly scheduled reading seminars and critique sessions. All

of the exercises, lectures, presentations, film screenings, critiques, etc. are designed to develop each student's technical, theoretical and conceptual approach to the subject matter and his/her understanding of the connections between these three elements. The course will culminate with your presentation of a highly refined and cohesive portfolio of work.

Artists: As participants in this course it is assumed that (in some way) you plan to pursue a career in the arts. As such, you will be treated as a serious artist from this point forward. That is to say, the trajectory of this course is pointed at contemporary, fine-art issues. We are here to get down to the earnest work of artistic enquiry and you will be expected to perform accordingly. This takes considerable time, energy, concentration, motivation, and perseverance. It is assumed that by registering for this class, you are dedicated to these challenges.

Nuts & Bolts (or... the fine print):

Attendance & Participation: This course will meet every Tuesday of the semester from 4:10 pm to 7:00 pm. By registering for this class it is assumed that you have arranged your schedule to commit to the full duration of these scheduled meetings. With only one meeting per week, it is critical that you attend every meeting. It is also critical that you individually maintain momentum with your creative work from meeting to meeting. Per NASAD requirements, this 3 credit course requires at least 3 hours of work per credit hour. We will be spending 3 of these hours in class each week leaving you to plan to spend at least another 6 hours per week on course material and projects. Plan to work on your projects during these additional 6 hours, as we will have very limited open studio hours in class throughout the semester.

Notes: You should always be prepared to take notes! During course demos, lectures, films, critiques and readings, you should be jotting down points for discussion. Occasionally, I will ask you to turn in your notes as a mode of taking roll during that course activity.

Grading: The primary factors used to determine your final grade in this class will be participation, completing weekly assignments, and the quality of your final portfolio. I will not assign letter grades to you projects during the quarter. You will simply be given credit for turning the required work on time. However, I will give you frequent critical feedback on the work you are doing. Essentially, grading from day to day is based on a credit/no credit system. At the end of the semester, the total number of credits will be divided into your number of earned credits and the resulting percentage will determine your grade based on a standard breakdown (percentage: 93-100 A, 90 – 92, A-, 87-89 B+, 83-86 B, 80-82 B-, 77-79 C+, 73-76 C, 70-72 C-, 67-69 D+, 63-66 D, 60-62, D-, 59 F). Your final portfolios will account for 25% of your final grade. Thus, points available for final portfolios will be calculated at 25% of the total points available by finals week. Late assignments will not be accepted (I'm not kidding, so don't even ask). If you know you will not be attending class on the due date for an assignment, you may turn your work in before the due date for credit. Incompletes for the course will only be given in cases of extreme emergency. It is the responsibility of the student to keep the instructor fully informed of such situations.

Examples of credit worth (one point) items are as follows:

- attending daily class
- weekly written assignments
- a weekly contact sheet from your emerging work
- notes (sometimes collected) that you take during film screenings
- participating in reading seminar

- attending critique
- presenting your work in critique
- commenting on the work of your peers during critique

Contact info: I will make use of your official UM email address on occasion to contact you. If you don't regularly check this account, please get in the habit, or arrange to have these emails forwarded to an account that you do use. The best way to reach me is via email at: matthew.hamon@umontana.edu or matt.hamon@mso.umt.edu. I can also be reached at personal phone number: (360)789-9727. Please only use this number for emergencies (issues in the art building or if you need to be bailed out of jail).

Etiquette: The problem is cell phones... I know it's difficult to be right here right now, but no cell phone calls are to be taken or made during class. Texting during class is particularly annoying and I'll probably mark you absent and make fun of you if I notice you texting during class activities. Turn off and put away all electronic devices: cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, etc. for the entire duration of class or wait for our regularly scheduled breaks to use these devices. Remove earbuds from your ears. Your faculty member understands that cell phones occasionally ring unexpectedly. In such cases, simply turn your phone off as discretely as possible. For emergency calls or texts, please leave the classroom.

Course Text: There is no required text for this class. Weekly reading selections will be made available via the course moodle site. Close reading of the text and note taking is required and will be monitored. Hard copies of your type written responses to weekly readings, or a map/diagram of the text, or a visual response (photograph) and brief statement, that demonstrates close reading of each text will be due during the first part of each class meeting. Again, late responses will not be accepted. A reading schedule will be provided via moodle, and will be updated weekly on the course moodle site.

Contact Sheets: A legible contact sheet (digital or film based) representing at least 24 new exposures (fewer for those working in sheet film) you have made in your industrious progress toward your final portfolio will be due at the beginning of each class meeting. Periodically, we will engage in a formal critique of these images.

Assignments & Exercises: My assignments and/or exercises should never get in the way of your learning. They are meant to create a dialogue that will stimulate and challenge you. They are also meant to give you an opportunity to express yourself. Make provocative work, but do not worry about pleasing your instructor or fulfilling someone else's expectations. If you do, you are forfeiting the most important freedom that your art will allow you.

Though you will primarily be responsible for diligently working on the production of your personal work, there are a few assignments associated with the course. Assignments are listed below. Details will be given in class.

- Two(2) finished prints from our 4x5 camera exercise.
- Two(2) images from a studio lighting exercise.
- A formal research paper on an artist who inspires your work.
- The development of an eloquent and articulate artist's statement.
- A formal artist's "source" presentation on your personal work (in the last few weeks of the quarter).
- Participation in regularly scheduled, "work in progress" critiques as a presenter and member of the audience.
- By program's end, A cohesive body of work that is neatly packaged in a portfolio.

Portfolios: By the end of the semester you will be responsible for completing a finished portfolio of images that is carefully packaged with image titles, portfolio title, and an artist's statement. Format for these portfolios can

be either matted and boxed (this option is most ideal), a graphic artist's portfolio with acetate sleeves, or a Blurb style bound book. Details on these formats will be discussed in class.

Equipment & Supplies: Face it... Art making is expensive. And, in our culture, it's rare that artists find external sources to fund their creative exploits. But then, these expenses are too much different from what we might dole out to engage in our other passions (smoking, drinking, snowboarding, etc). Plann to budget for the following expenses.

- A notebook or journal for note taking, sketching, diagraming and doodling throughout the semester.
- A camera and enough film, photo paper (you should be using fiber based paper now), inkjet paper, etc... to archivally finish a portfolio of cohesively themed images.
- Matte board to window matte at least ten (10) finished images.
- An archival portfolio or portfolio box to package your final thesis work.
- Material to frame two (2) finished prints for gallery presentation.

Sources:

Equipment and supplies: The Dark Room on Higgins

Equipment and supplies: Freestylephoto.biz

Equipment and supplies: Bhphotovideo.com

Equipment and supplies: Adorama.com

Equipment: Mac-on-campus.com

Used Equipment: Keh.com

Digital output: Target, Wal-Mart

Note: I encourage you to identify a process (digital, film, film-to-digital, etc), a format (35mm, 120mm 4x5, Holga), a scale, and a paper stock (glossy, matte, warm, cold, etc) as early as you can in the semester and stick to it. This will make it easier to perfect and more cost effective to produce and package. Of course, all of the above decision should be in support of the conceptual content in your work!

Students With Special Needs: It is not at all out of the ordinary for various students to have unique needs and learning styles. If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services. If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodation, please present the letter to me as soon as possible so we can discuss the accommodations you might need in order to succeed in this program. Though requirements for the course will not be adjusted for individual needs, I am happy to assist each individual in meeting the requirements for the course.

Now, what's this stuff?... Well, we happen to have wound up with an entirely blank page, so why not fill it with some random musing....

Matt's Pearls and Perils of Photographic Wisdom (to be taken with a grain of salt):

- 1. Regarding originality: Don't worry about originality. Everything you do is original. Even original copies are original. Concentrate on your content. Let other folks worry about what is original. Most art is too original. Save your originality for a writing class. If you make work that is true to who you are, it will be original.
- 2. Regarding technique: Learn technique to enhance your content. There is too much technique and not enough content and feeling. Great artists have always kept technique in perspective. Mediocre artists always get lost in technique. When the need arises you can always learn technique from some web site or text. Photographers love to talk about technique.
- 3. Regarding sources: Use your own experience as a primary source. It is all that you will ever have anyway. Study yourself. Watch yourself eat, walk, talk, interact, and take a bath. You are amazing. Humans are fascinating and you are human. Look at other humans. Think very carefully about your fears and desires. What more do you need for a source?
- 4. Regarding hard work: If you know you work hard enough then don't read any further. Don't look for someone to motivate you to work harder. Most artists work hard because they want to. Hard work is not work when you are making art and enjoying it. There is no way for a teacher to know if you worked hard or if you made something quickly and easily the night before class. Some artists take a long time to make something but they are not working hard... They are just slow or disorganized. Other artists produce work very quickly with bursts of hard work. There is no rule about hard work. Good work is the goal. Hard work is not the problem.
- 5. Regarding Liquid Emulsion: No one has ever made a compelling or significant work of photographic art using liquid emulsion. If you have seen something done in this material and you think it is terrific please bring it to our attention. If you want to use the stuff, try coating an egg and printing an image of yourself on it.
- 6. Reading: Read everything you can get your hands on. Read a newspaper everyday if possible. It doesn't have to be today's paper. Look for stories about things you like to think about. Suffering and crime, money and politics, love and old folks, whatever... It is all in the paper. Tabloids are good too. Flash Art is the best art magazine. Don't believe everything you read.
- 7. Regarding sleep: Make sure you get enough sleep to be an attentive participant in your classes. Don't sleep so much that you are late for class. If your teacher is boring it is OK to nod off once in a while... If you need deep sleep please wait until we can all join you.
- 8. Regarding pets: Jeff Koons has already made all the pet art that we need. William Wegman's work was much better before he started making cute pictures of his dogs. William Wegman is learning to paint. Many films have been made about dogs, cats, ants, and pigs. You can take pictures of your birds, fish, cats, dogs, and reptiles. However, these creatures are best left at home both visually and physically. It is quite a challenge to photograph pets because they are designed to be cute. The only good photograph of a dog that exists was made by Joseph Koudelka.
- 9. Never agree to photograph a wedding.
- 10. About artist's block: There is a lot of talk about artist's block. I knew a person once who felt that they had artist's block. It turned out that they were actually just bored. This person also thought they had Epstein-Barr virus; again, it turned out that they were bored. I have never known this malady to afflict an artist. If you feel you are creatively blocked see your academic advisor immediately about getting your course waived, or refer to number 3.
- 11. All photographs have a figure-ground relationship. Successful photographs have a harmonious figure-ground relationship. Think of the background or foreground in your images as the stage for your subject.
- 12. Most good photographs have compelling and curious qualities of light. Start looking for this light!

- 12. Surround yourself with your images and images by other artists. Tape some of your new work to the wall near your bed. With time, it will reveal things to you that you had not considered.
- 13. Diane Arbus would purposely damage her prints by tearing off a corner. Why do you think she did this?
- 14. When you see work that you like find out who made it. If you know them, tell them you saw their work and tell them what you like about it. If you don't already know the person, contact them. Tell them that you like their work and that you would like to meet them.
- 15. Go to every art-opening and lecture that is within reasonable proximity to you. It doesn't matter what medium is on display or how successful the artist is. Look at everything. Listen to everyone.
- 16. Go to galleries once a month, even to the galleries you don't like. Ask yourself what it is you like about the work. Ask yourself what it is you don't like about the work. Make sure you know the answers to these questions!
- 17. Regarding equipment: Never forget that a camera is simply a light tight box. Equipment does not make good art. Most photography students have cameras which far exceed the demands of their work. Consider replacing all of your gear with homemade pinhole cameras or a fragile, poor quality plastic cameras like a Lomo or a Holga. Check out the Lomo website. Donate your Nikon to a youth art program. Small kids love expensive cameras.

And, as a counter point... Some Do's, Don't's, and Truisms by Charles Traub. From; The Education of a Photographer.

The Do's

- Do something old in a new way
- Do something new in an old way
- Do something new in a new way, Whatever works . . . works
- Do it sharp, if you can't, call it art
- Do it in the computer—if it can be done there
- Do fifty of them—you will definitely get a show
- Do it big, if you cant do it big, do it red
- If all else fails turn it upside down, if it looks good it might work
- Do Bend your knees
- If you don't know what to do, look up or down—but continue looking
- Do celebrities—if you do a lot of them, you'll get a book
- Connect with others—network
- Edit it yourself
- Design it yourself
- Publish it yourself
- Edit, When in doubt shoot more
- Edit again
- Read Darwin, Marx, Joyce, Freud, Einstein, Benjamin, McLuhan, and Barth
- See Citizen Kane ten times
- Look at everything—stare
- Construct your images from the edge inward
- If it's the "real world," do it in color
- If it can be done digitally—do it
- Be self centered, self involved, and generally entitled and always pushing—and damned to hell for doing it
- Break all rules, except the chairman's

The Don'ts

- Don't do it about yourself—or your friend—or your family
- Don't dare photograph yourself nude
- Don't look at old family albums
- Don't hand color it

- Don't write on it
- Don't use alternative process—if it ain't straight do it in the computer
- Don't gild the lily—AKA less is more
- Don't go to video when you don't know what else to do
- Don't photograph indigent people, particularly in foreign lands
- Don't whine, just produce

The Truisms

- Good work sooner or later gets recognized
- There are a lot of good photographers who need it before they are dead
- If you walk the walk, sooner or later you'll learn to talk the talk
- If you talk the talk too much, sooner or later you are probably not walking the walk (don't bullshit)
- Photographers are the only creative people that don't pay attention to their predecessors work—if you imitate something good, you are more likely to succeed
- Whoever originated the idea will surely be forgotten until he or she's dead—corollary: steal someone else's idea before they die
- If you have to imitate, at least imitate something good
- Know the difference
- Critics never know what they really like
- Critics are the first to recognize the importance of that which is already known in the community at large
- The best critics are the ones who like your work
- Theoreticians don't like to look—they're generally too busy writing about themselves
- Given enough time, theoreticians will contradict and reverse themselves
- Practice does not follow theory
- Theory follows practice
- All artists think they're self taught
- All artists lie, particularly about their dates and who taught them
- No artist has ever seen the work of another artist (the exception being the post-modernists who've adapted appropriation as another means of reinventing the history)
- The curator or the director is the one in black
- The artist is the messy one in black
- The owner is the one with the Prada bag
- The gallery director is the one who recently uncovered the work of a forgotten person from his or her widower
- Every galleriest has to discover someone
- Every curator has to re-discover someone
- The best of them is the one who shows your work
- Every generation re-discovers the art of photography
- Photography history gets reinvented every ten years
- New galleries discover old photographers
- Galleries need to fill their walls—corollary: thus new talents will always be found
- Galleriests say hanging pictures is an art
- There are no collectors, only people with money
- Anyone who buys your work is a collector—your parents don't count
- All photographers are voyeurs
- Admit it and get on with looking
- Everyone, is narcissistic, anyone can be photographed
- Photography is about looking
- Learning how to look takes practice
- All photography, in the right context at the right time is valuable
- It is always a historical document
- Sooner or later someone will say it is art
- Any photographer can call himself an artist,
- But not every artist can call himself a photographer
- Compulsiveness Helps

- Neatness helps too
 - Hard work helps the most
 - The style is felt—fashion is fad
 - Remember, its usually about who, what, where, when, why, and how
 - It is who you know
 - Many a good idea is found in a garbage can
 - But darkrooms are dark. . . and dank, forgidaboutit
 - The best exposure is the one that works
 - Expose for the shadows, and develop for the highlights
 - Or better yet, shoot digitally.
 - Cameras don't think, they don't have memories
 - But digital cameras have something called memory
 - Learn to see as the camera sees, don't try to make it see as the human eye sees
 - Remember digital point and shoots are faster than Leicas
 - Though the computer can correct anything, a bad image is a bad image
 - If all else fails, you can remember, again, to either do it large or red
 - Or, tear it up and tape it together
 - It always looks better on the wall framed
 - If they don't sell, raise your price
 - Self-importance rises with the prices of your images on the wall
 - The work of a dead artist is always more valuable than the work of a live one
- You can always pretend to kill yourself and start all over.